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Summer



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Hutchings

Miss Maybel Hampton
Washington, D. C.

Indian Summer

NEW BORZOI NOVELS

FALL, 1922

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ONE OF OURS

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THE MOTH DECIDES

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INDIAN SUMMER

Emily Grant Hutchings

INDIAN
SUMMER
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NEW YORK 1922

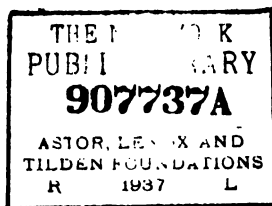


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ALFRED A. KNOFF, INC.

Published, July, 1922

Second Printing, August, 1922

Third Printing September, 1922



Set up, electrotyped, and printed by the Vail-Ballou Co., Binghamton, N. Y.

Paper furnished by Perkins-Goodwin Co., New York, N. Y.

Bound by the Plimpton Press, Norwood, Mass.

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To Edwin Hutchings
My Inspiration

AMERICAN BOOK CO. AUG 1937

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Prologue

I Lavinia

I

Tense quiet filled the crooked streets of Bromfield, the quiet that presages storm. Vine Larimore looked anxiously from the window. She was not afraid of tempests: she reveled in them. But a great fear had gripped her in the night. Why had Calvin failed to stop on his way home from the station? What business was it that took Calvin Stone to Rochester every week or two? Another sweetheart? She would not give the hideous thought house room. Was not she, Lavinia Larimore, the handsomest girl in Bromfield? Was not her father, next to the Calvins and the Stones, the most important man in the rusty old New York village? Had she not worn Calvin's ring for three endless years? Most of the girls in her set were already married, and at New Year's she had worn the green stockings for her seventeen-year-old sister, Isabel. The wedding dress she had made with so much care and skill, two years ago, hid its once modish lines beneath the cover of the cedar chest—the hope chest that Calvin had ordered for her at Stephen Trench's shop.

Calvin's father had promised them the old house on High Street, to be remodeled and furnished with the

best that Rochester could provide. Mr. Trench had twice figured on the contract, and yet Calvin dallied. It was first one pretext and then another. Once, when he asked her what she wanted for her birthday—it was the latter part of May, and Lavinia would be twenty—she took her courage in her shaking hands and pleaded for a wedding. It was an unmaidenly thing. Bromfield would have branded her as bold. But Calvin saw in her abashed eyes the image of his own dereliction. To be sure he still loved her. He had always intended to make good his pledge. They would be married the middle of August, when the G. A. R. was giving a great excursion to New York City. That would be a honeymoon well worth the waiting.

And then, on the second of July, the President was shot. Vine was shocked, as everyone was; but what had that to do with her wedding? Calvin could not think of marrying while Mr. Garfield's life was in doubt.

The President had died, and it was now October. Vine saw Calvin almost daily. In a little town, with the Larimore home near the middle of the principal street, such contact was almost inevitable. But Lavinia found no avenue of approach. Calvin was usually sullen or distraught. Sometimes he took the long *détour* across the bridge and up behind Stephen Trench's carpenter shop, on his way to and from the bank. This morning, with a storm brewing, he could hardly risk that walk. He must pass the house any minute. She would stop him and demand an explanation. She knew just what she wanted to say, and when she was thoroughly aroused her tongue never failed her.

There was a step on the grass-grown flag-stones, an eager step. Lavinia was on her feet—her fury gone, she knew not where, or why. He was coming. In an-

Prologue

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other minute she would be in his arms, listening to the same old excuses, feeding her hope on the same old shreds of promise. And then . . . The front door opened and Ellen Porter's interrogating eyes met hers. Ellen and Ted Larimore were soon to be married, but the early morning call had nothing to do with the fever of activity that had disturbed the routine of two households for a month past.

"Vine, did Calvin show you what he bought in Rochester yesterday?"

"Who told you he bought anything?"

"Papa. He saw him in the jewelry store. He was looking at wedding rings. He turned his back when he saw somebody from Bromfield; but papa was almost sure he bought one. Vine, are you going to beat Ted and me out, after all?"

Lavinia thought for a moment that she would suffocate. The blood pounded in her ears and the room swam dizzily before her. And then the storm broke. She tried to fashion some convincing reply; but the thunder was deafening and the rain beat loudly against the windows. She ran to get a floor cloth, when little rivulets began to trickle over the sill. Ellen sought to help her with the transom, that was seldom closed from spring to fall, when the door was pushed open violently and Ted Larimore, dripping and out of temper, burst into the room. He had forgotten something. No, he could not stop to change his coat. He would take Ellen back to the store with him. For this, at least, his sister was grateful. By noon she would have seen Calvin—would know the meaning of the ring. She would see Calvin . . . if she had to go to the bank. Things could not go on this way.

II Calvin

I

While Ted and Ellen strolled down Main Street, oblivious of the rain that swirled upon them, now from the east, now from the south, and while Lavinia plunged with headlong haste into the morning's housework, a conversation was under way in the dining-room of the Stone mansion. Calvin was late coming down to breakfast and his father had waited for him.

"You have something on your mind, and you might as well out with it," the elder was saying, as he drew his napkin from his collar and folded it crookedly.

Calvin drummed the table with uneasy fingers.

"Gambling again?"

"No, Sir."

"Drinking?"

"No, Sir."

"What then? Look here, Calvin Stone, you can't fool your mother and me. You act like a sheep-stealing dog. What were you doing in Rochester yesterday?"

"I was married."

The words fell with the dull impact of a mass of putty. His father's eyes opened wide, then narrowed, and his huge shoulders bent forward.

"Who did you marry? Vine wasn't with you."

"That's just the trouble, father. I didn't marry Vine. Fact is, I didn't intend to get married at all. Lettie took me by surprise when she told me—"

"Lettie who?"

"Arlette Fournier. She's French—and a stunner. I met her at a dance last winter. Oh, she's a good fellow. She'll keep it secret till I get out of this scrape with Vine. She wouldn't want me to bring her to Bromfield for a year or two."

Stone brought his fist down on the table with a vehemence that rattled the breakfast china.

"Have you no conscience, no decency? How are you going to square yourself with that girl?"

"I couldn't square myself with both of them. I've been thinking it over, since I got home last night. I thought I'd play on Vine's pride . . . snub her openly, you know, so that she'd get in a huff and throw me over. Then I could afterwards pretend I married the other girl for spite. That would save Vine's feelings."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, you miserable coward. You are going to Viny Larimore this very morning, and confess what you've done."

"No. I am not!"

"I say you are."

"You don't know what you are talking about. I'd never get out of her house alive. You never saw Vine when she was mad. I'd go back to Rochester—I'd—jump in the river, before I'd face her. I don't have to stay here. Lettie has money of her own, that we could live off of. She doesn't want to live in this ugly village, any way."

"You could take your living from this stranger, this foreigner that nobody ever heard of? You—you say she is rich? Who are her people?"

"Father, won't you—"

Calvin's voice, a moment before raucous with assur-

ance and determination, broke into waves of impotent pleading. He had perceived the flaw in his parent's armour. To press home his advantage was the task of the moment.

"Her uncle is one of the leading business men of Rochester, and she has money in her own right. She's been an orphan since she was six years old—sent over here from France by herself, after her parents died, and nobody to look after her. Father, won't you go and straighten it out with Vine? Honest, I can't."

The elder Stone spat with disgust.

II

In slicker and high rubber boots Calvin took the long muddy road to the bank. From every rain-drenched shrub along the way Lavinia Larimore's outraged womanhood glared at him. For an hour he tried to work, conscious of his father's eyes with their unfeeling condemnation. When the strain became unbearable, he took a silver-mounted pistol from the safe—with surreptitious gesture, yet making sure that the object in his hand did not escape notice—and thrust it into the drawer of his desk. The threat bore fruit.

Mr. Stone took down hat and umbrella and went forth into the abating storm. He was not a man to mince words when he had an unpleasant task before him. Vine greeted him at the door. Her dark cheeks blanched.

"What—where is Calvin? Is he sick? Has anything happened to him?"

"I wish to God he was dead. Viny, I hope you don't care any too much for that young scoundrel. He isn't worthy of the love of a decent girl."

"He hasn't— You mean, he has embezzled money?"

Mr. Stone, you won't let it be found out? I wouldn't go back on him for—Oh, you won't. . . .”

“I'd brain him if he ever touched a penny that didn't belong to him.”

“Then what—what has he done?”

“He was married, yesterday, to a girl in Rochester.”

“Married!” And then, in an incredulous whisper, “married.”

A moment only Lavinia stood numb and baffled. Then the words poured in a rising tide of indignation, rage, fury. Three years she had waited, and for this. She might have had any one of a dozen—the finest young men in Bromfield. Calvin Stone had won her away from them all. He had deprived her of her girlhood, her opportunities—everything but her self-respect. She had known for two years that he was a drunkard and a gambler. She had clung to him, because it was her Christian duty to reform him. His parents would not have her to blame when he reeled into a drunkard's grave. It was fortunate that some fool woman had taken the burden from her shoulders. She would have stuck to her promise, in the face of certain misery. The Larimores had that kind of honour—such honour as all the Calvin and Stone money could not buy. But now she need no longer keep up the pretense of caring for a man who was not fit to wipe the mud from her shoes. She had tried to hold together what little manhood was in him—to spare his parents the disgrace he was sure to bring upon them.

Once and again the bank president, who was wont to command silence, to be granted a respectful hearing in the highest councils of the town, sought to breast the tide of her anger. His interruptions were swept away like spindrift. He wanted to offer financial restitution, since

no other was possible. She met the proposal with scorn. Money could not cover up the disgrace of such a consummation. Calvin might rue his bargain, and come back to plead for forgiveness. The desperately proffered balm brought a more bitter outburst. She would not be any man's second choice. No, the damage was irreparable. It was done.

III

As the man of finance turned the interview over in his mind, a curious balance was struck—and his heart softened towards his son. There might have been other tongue-lashings. No woman could have achieved such fluency without practice. Before he reached the front door of the little bank, Lavinia was in her own room, her compact figure half submerged in the feather bed, her hot tears of shame and chagrin wetting the scarlet stars of the quilt her own deft fingers had pieced. She had lost her temper—it was easily misplaced—but the scene she had raised had no share in her memory of the encounter. Her humiliation blotted all else from view. It was not only that she had aimed at the highest, and lost. She loved Calvin Stone with all the passion of a fiery nature—loved him with a depth and intensity that might be gauged by the hate that loomed on the surface of her wrath. And there was no one in the whole world to whom she could open her heart.

Mrs. Larimore knew there had been a quarrel, a quarrel that outran the morning's tempest in violence; but when she ventured to ask what the trouble was, Lavinia told her curtly that it was none of her business. Now she stood outside the door, listening to her daughter's stormy sobbing. She had never been on intimate terms with her children, and the relationship with her eldest

Prologue

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daughter was most casual. A headstrong girl. Where she got her ambition—unless it was a heritage from her Grandmother Larimore—no one could say. The other members of the family were easygoing, content with the day's pleasure and profit. But Lavinia was avid for work, for praise, for position. She would shine as Mrs. Calvin Stone, if ever. . . . And then Mrs. Larimore began afresh to wonder.

III David

I

Early in the afternoon, when the sun was making furtive efforts to slip past the cloud-guard and repair the damage the rain had wrought, Lavinia stepped briskly from her room, clad in her best blue silk poplin. An hour past she had been bathing her eyes, and her mirror satisfied her that the redness and swelling were all gone. She went straight to her father's store, across from the bank. Ellen Porter would be there, behind the bookkeeper's desk.

"I want you to do something for me, Nell," she began—noting the hollow in her voice, and striving against it. "I want you to take this to Mr. Stone."

She held a small, neatly tied parcel in her hand. They walked to the wide doorway and stood watching the sun-glints in the pools of the muddy street, each waiting for the other to venture on some hospitable avenue of speech. Ellen considered her thin-soled shoes, scarce dry from the morning's wetting, glanced at the precarious stepping stones, half a block away . . . and caught sight of David Trench, coming towards them. She beckoned him.

David was a shy, fair-cheeked youth, a few months older than Lavinia and Ellen. The three had been christened the same Sunday in the little Presbyterian church. They had gone through the village school together, and David and Ellen sang leading parts in the church choir. It was Dave Trench who sharpened their skates, pulled their sleds up the hill, tuned their pianos,

repaired their furniture, took them home from Sunday evening services when no other escort was available.

"Vine wants you to do an errand for her, Davy. Would you mind taking this little package over to the bank?"

"I wouldn't mind going to Halifax for her."

Ellen laid the parcel in his hand. He was to give it to Mr. Stone. In no case was he to give it to Calvin. As his lithe figure melted into the gloom of the building across the way, she turned for the information that was her due.

"It's my engagement ring."

"What!"

"Yes, I've given Calvin the mitten. His father came down this morning and laboured with me for more than an hour to get me to change my mind; but I told him I would never marry a man who smoked and drank and gambled. That was what I was about to tell you this morning, when Ted ran in on us. I've had him on probation since last spring—for two years, in fact. He's promised me over and over. And yesterday, after he bought the ring for our wedding, he went and got roaring drunk—fell into the hands of some disreputable woman—and— Why, Ellen, when he stopped at the house last night he was so maudlin that he couldn't give an account of where he'd been or what had happened to him. You can guess how we parted. He told his father this morning that he'd go to the dogs if I turned him down. Mr. Stone almost got down on his knees to me, but it was all wasted. When I'm done, I'm done."

Ellen Porter had but one grievous fault. When she found herself unable to keep a secret, she did not scruple to seek help. Lavinia thought afterward it had been almost an inspiration . . . telling Ellen. By Sunday it

would be all over town, each one of Ellen's confidantes pledged to hold the revelation sacred. She knew, too, how Calvin's lapse from virtue would grow with each fresh telling of the story. By another Sunday it would be murder he had committed.

II

The ring delivered, Vine went home to plan the next move. That she must leave Bromfield before the truth of Calvin's marriage leaked out, she did not so much as debate. There was an uncle in the wilds of Illinois. Once she had visited him, with the result that the buffalo and Indian frontier had receded some leagues farther to the west. A coal mining town. She remembered that some adventurous investors dreamed of oil and natural gas. There ought to be employment for an energetic, fairly well educated girl who was accustomed to hard work.

Lavinia Larimore had not been blessed with an elastic nature, but in moments of desperation she manifested something like the elasticity of ivory. She could yield, yet show no after-trace of the yielding. By night her plans were well on the way towards maturity. She would write to her uncle, and wait for a reply before telling her parents of her purpose.

She opened the small drawer of the secretary, only to discover that it was bare of stamps. Her brother Theodore would be going to Ellen's, and the post office was not far out of his way. But Ted would ask questions. No, she would wait for David Trench. He and his father worked at the shop every evening, and he would be passing at nine.

Up to this point Lavinia had thought of David as nothing more than an errand boy. But as she sat by the

window in the gathering dusk, he began to change before her fevered eyes, to assert his height and the grace of his strong young hands. She had never thought about David's hands before. Strange that the hard work had never rendered them unshapely. Calvin's hands were pudgy, the fingers short and thick. She had always been conscious of Calvin's hands—had viewed them almost with repugnance even when she craved their touch the most.

David's smile was beautiful. He would grow into a fine-looking man, like his father. Now that they had taken to refinishing antique furniture, there would be money in the shop for two households. David would always be kind. He might even. . . . What was she thinking! A startled laugh burst from her lips. Davy, little Davy Trench! With a suppressed, "Huh! I might go farther and fare worse," she tossed the absurd thought aside. A moment later it presented itself in another guise. She was still toying with the audacious intruder when she heard David's slow, regular step on the stone flagging. Through the open window she called his name. With nervous haste she lighted the tall, flamboyantly shaded piano lamp and motioned him to a chair. Then she seated herself rather stiffly on the old-fashioned sparking settee, her heart pounding, her tongue thick and useless.

"Was there something I could do for you, Vine?"

"You wouldn't—mind—going back to the post office, Dave? I want to get off an important letter to my uncle. He wants me to come out to Illinois, and—there isn't a stamp in the house."

"I'm sorry, but you can't send it tonight. The post office was closed when I came by, and the last mail goes up to Rochester at half-past eight. If you had only told

me sooner. . . . I'll be glad to stop by and get it in the morning, on my way to the shop."

"Oh, well, it's not so urgent. I'll have it ready before breakfast. You won't forget to stop?"

"Why, of course not, Vine."

"David, would you be sorry if I should go away from Bromfield—to stay?"

"It wouldn't be Bromfield without you."

Lavinia Larimore took the bit in her teeth.

"Dave, what do you think Ellen Porter was saying to me when you came to the store, this afternoon?"

"I couldn't guess."

"She said it was all over town that you and I are going to be married."

"I—" The boy gasped. He gripped the edge of his chair and the blood died out of his cheeks. "Vine, you oughtn't to make fun of me that way. It isn't kind."

"I wasn't making fun of you, Davy. Honest to goodness, everybody has noticed how much we have been together lately."

"But Calvin?"

"Pooh! I broke off with him long ago. Dave, are you asleep, that you don't know it is all over between Calvin and me?"

"I—I am afraid I'm dreaming now."

"No, you aren't. You are broad awake, and I'm telling you the truth. I would not marry Calvin Stone if he was the last man left on earth. He is a low-lived gambler—and I despise him. He isn't worth your little finger."

David slipped from his chair and gained the settee, somehow, his knees knocking together.

"Vine, do you mean— Would I be a fool to—" Then his lips found hers.

Prologue

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At midnight David Trench stumbled drunkenly home, his head bumping the stars, while Lavinia took the two-year-old wedding dress from the cedar chest and planned to modernize its lines.

Book One

Spring

IV Vine Cottage

I

The cottage had been vacant almost four months, an economic waste that cut deeply into Lavinia Trench's pin-money. Not that David stinted her in the matter of funds. The purse strings had always lain loosely in David's hands. But her penurious soul, bent on making the best possible showing of whatever resources came within her reach, rebelled at the insolent idleness of invested capital. Vine Cottage had been hers, to do with as she pleased, since the completion of the big Colonial mansion that housed the remnant of the Trench family. There were not half-a-dozen furnished residences to let in Springdale, and that this one should have been unoccupied since the middle of November was inexplicable.

"You haven't half way tried to rent it," the woman charged, her eyes shifting from her husband's face to the cottage beyond the low stone wall, with its sullenly drawn blinds and its air of insensate content. Her glance rested appraisingly on the broad veranda, now banked with wet February snow; the little glass-enclosed breakfast room that had been her own conservatory, in the years gone by; the sturdy-throated chimney, that would never draw—but that none the less served as one of the important talking points of the cottage. An attractive set of gas logs did away with the danger of stale wood smoke in the library; but the chimney remained—moss-covered at the corners, near the ground, a hardy ampelopsis tracing a pattern of brown lace

against its dull red bricks. There were eight rooms and a capacious attic. The furniture was excellent. There was a garage, too, with living quarters for the servants. In the year of grace, nineteen hundred and nine, there were not many residences in Springdale with garages.

"I heard at church, Sunday, that Mrs. Marksley is looking for a house. You know, Vine, their place on Grant Drive is for sale—against the building of the new house in Marksley's Addition. Do you want me to—"

"Mrs. Marksley! Humph!" Lavinia's black eyes snapped. It would be to her liking to have the wife of the richest man in town as her tenant. Still . . . the situation had its disadvantages, not the least of which was that they would be moving out again in a few months, and the same old problem to be faced afresh.

"Do as you like about speaking to Mr. Marksley. But remember, David, I don't recommend it."

"It's your house, my dear. You blamed me for offering the place to Sylvia when she was married. I told you, last fall, I'd have nothing more to do with it."

He bent to kiss her, a kiss that was part of the compulsory daily routine, and hurriedly left the house. Lavinia turned his words over in her mind, and her gorge rose. David was always that way. You could never make him shoulder responsibility. True, she had wanted Sylvia next door, where she could watch over her daughter's blundering beginnings at housekeeping. And anyone would say it was an honour to have Professor Penrose in the family—even if his salary was small. But another lessee—with the boon of a commercial position in Detroit at four times the amount he received from the little denominational college in Springdale—would have been held to the strict interpretation

of the lease. David would not hear of Oliver and Sylvia paying rent for a house they did not occupy, a sentiment promptly seconded by his daughter. Sylvia never failed to perceive her own advantage—a fact at once gratifying and maddening to her mother. What if David had been like that? What if She always put David aside. Why bother about the inevitable?

II

Mr. Trench did not go at once to the office of Trench & Son, architects and general building contractors. It was important to his domestic peace that some definite step be taken towards the renting of the cottage. He would stop, he thought, at the office of the Argus, and insert a three-time advertisement. He could bring the matter up with Henry Marksley, for whom he always had some construction work on hand. But second thought deterred him. It might be disastrous to have young Hal Marksley next door, if only for a few months. Hal was a senior in the Presbyterian college. His recent attentions to Eileen Trench, just approaching her sixteenth birthday, had been disquieting to her father, none the less because of her mother's unconcealed approval.

Eileen was impressionable. A youth of Hal Marksley's—David searched his mind for the word. Disposition? He was more than amiable. Principles? Not quite that, either. In short, there was nothing he could urge against the young man that had not been set at naught by Eileen's mother. Money had lifted the Marksleys above the restrictions imposed upon common people. Their life had been unconventional, at times positively scandalous. Eileen's iconoclastic spirit would grasp at anything to justify her revolt against the

conventional trammels of her home, the puritanical regulations which served Lavinia in lieu of religion. There was enough friction in that quarter already.

As he passed the college campus, with its motley group of buildings—dingy red brick of forty years' standing, and the impudent modernity of Bedford stone with trimmings of terra cotta and Carthage marble—he caught sight of Dr. Schubert's mud-bespattered buggy. The grey mare, these ten years a stranger to the restraining tether, nosed contentedly in the snow for the succulent sprigs that were already making their appearance among the exposed roots of the huge old elms. From the opposite side of the street the family physician waved a driving glove.

"Wait a minute, David." He made his way cautiously through the ooze of the crudely paved avenue. "I was on my way out to your house. Stopped to look in on a pneumonia that kept me up nearly all night. Does Mrs. Trench still want to rent the cottage? Or is it true that Sylvia and Penrose are coming back?"

"They are well pleased with Detroit. And my wife is most anxious for a tenant. You know, Doctor, she draws the line on children and dogs."

"We ought to be able to close a very satisfactory deal. My old friend, Griffith Ramsay, spent the night with us. He's out here from New York—some legal business connected with the mines at Olive Hill, for a client of his, a Mrs. Ascott. The lady is recently widowed, and in need of some kind of diversion. I had been telling him about my experiments, my need for a competent assistant in the laboratory, and he arrived at the conclusion that these two needs would neutralize each other. Mrs. Ascott, having a large financial stake in the mines, would be interested in the possibility of increasing the

value of soft coal. The more he thought about it, the greater his enthusiasm. The one thing in the way, he thought, would be a suitable place for her to live. That was when Vine Cottage popped into my mind. I'll send him around to the office to talk over the details of the lease with you."

V Judith Goes West

I

Mrs. Ascott had an early appointment with her attorney. An early appointment necessitated her catching the nine-fifteen train for the city. That, again, implied the disruption of the entire household regimen, and Judith Ascott had learned not to try her mother's patience too far. She was the unpleasant note in an otherwise satisfactory family. True, her mother had stood by her through all the scandal and unpleasantness. But the changing of the breakfast hour was quite another matter.

As she slipped into the pantry of the big suburban home and set the coffee machine going, she turned over in her mind another reason for her care not to disturb the family slumber. She did not know why her attorney wished to see her—was not even sure which member of the firm would be awaiting her, that still March morning. The long-distance message conveyed the bare information that the business was urgent. Might there be another delay in the divorce? She had been assured that the decree would be in her hands by the end of the week; but gruff old Sanderson, the senior partner, was not so sure. Any reference to the "distasteful affair" threw her mother into a nervous chill. A note on the breakfast table, informing the family that she had caught the early express for a morning at the art gallery, would suffice as well as any other explanation.

All the way in, between the snow-decked New York

fields and the dreary waste of the Sound, she dwelt moodily on the unpleasant possibilities of the coming interview. But when she emerged from the confusion of the Grand Central station, already in the turmoil of reconstruction, she thought only of the relative merits of the taxicab and the subway. She had schooled herself, in times of stress, to take refuge in irrelevant trifles. She had learned, too, that the more she worried before the ordeal the less occasion she found for worry when the actual conditions confronted her. In view of her sleepless night, she would probably find roses and Griff Ramsay instead of thorns and Donald Sanderson.

II

The attorney had thought it all out, had decided just how he was going to break the news. But when he found his client confronting him, across the unaccustomed barrier of his desk, his assurance forsook him.

"Judith, what are you going to do, now that you are free?"

"What am I going to do, Griff? That, as usual, depends on mamma. You know I have never planned anything—vital—in my life. When she lays too much stress on the 'must' I do the opposite. She says that I am going to sail with her and the boys on the fifth of April, a month from to-day. Ben is going on with his architecture at the Beaux Arts and Jack is wild about airplanes. Paris has hideous memories—but there's no other place for me."

"You are not going to Paris."

The woman started. "No?"

"Not if you have the qualities I believe you have. Judith, may I for once talk cold unpleasant facts? You are twenty-seven years old and the life you have made for

yourself is a failure." Mrs. Ascott deprecated the finality of the word, but she let it pass. "Going to Paris would only be temporizing. Your mother's influence has always been bad. You and your father are scarcely acquainted. Your brothers are too young to count. Laura and I have been your only intimates, since your return to New York. I need not remind you of our staunch friendship for you."

"Griff—tell me what you have in mind. I promise not to cry out, if I do squirm a little."

He told her of Springdale, the kindly old physician who had a theory that soft coal could be transformed, at the mines, into clean fuel and a whole retinue of valuable by-products—of his need for a secretary and laboratory assistant, to keep his records and assist him with experiments. He told her of Vine Cottage, its wide garden and fruit trees. "The house faces south. Get that solidly established in your mind," he admonished. He knew how important it was for Judith Ascott to be properly oriented. Other details of the place he painted, graphic and engaging. She would take with her her old nurse, Nanny. For servants he had leased Jeff Dutton and wife, who occupied the rooms above the garage. As an afterthought he added that she would spend four mornings a week in Dr. Schubert's laboratory. Her compensation—a large block of treasury stock in the corporation that would result from the evolving of a process for the cleansing of soft coal.

"Where is this Springdale—this Utopia? What has it to do with Sutton and Olive Hill, where the mines are located?"

"As little as possible. You'll note that Springdale draws its virtuous white skirts away from those filthy towns, with an air so smug that it would disgust you if

it were not so amusingly naïve. It claims ten thousand inhabitants—when the census taker isn't within hearing. There is a denominational college—co-ed, I believe—with a conservatory of music and a school of dramatic art. The President isn't the lean sycophant in a shabby Prince Albert coat that you might expect. I met him—a singularly spruce-minded successor to that old Presbyterian war-horse, Thomas Henderson, who built the college out of Illinois dirt."

"Sounds interesting, Griff. Is there any more?"

"Yes, ever so much. The college isn't the whole show, by any means. At one end of the town is a Bible Institute and at the other an asylum for the feeble-minded. There is a manual training school for deaf-mutes and a sanitarium for drug fiends and booze fighters. On the whole, quite an intellectual centre. It is under no circumstances to be confused with Springfield, the capital of the state. You are sentenced to live there for a year. At the end of your term you may come back to New York—if you haven't found yourself."

"Only last night I was wishing that I could run away—somewhere—anywhere—to a place I had never heard of. Do you think I can do the work?"

"Oh, that part of it. . . . My only concern is for your mother. I'll send Laura down to Pelham to help persuade her."

Judith Ascott's finely modelled shoulders came up in an almost imperceptible shrug. "Mamma will be so relieved. Don't trouble Laura. I was only going to Paris because there was no convenient pigeonhole to stow me away 'till wanted.' Mamma, of course, hopes that I will marry. She wouldn't want me tagging around after her, the rest of her life. *You* know that I am done with men."

"By-the-way," Ramsay interrupted, "I led those people to suppose your husband was dead. It's that kind of town. Not the old doctor, understand. His sympathy's as wide as humanity. But your next-door neighbours—excellent people, though with small-town limitations. You'll have to depend on them for such social life as your gregarious nature demands. How soon can you be ready to go west?"

"As soon as I can bring Nanny from Vermont. I ought to be on my way in a week."

III

Later in the day, when she found herself alone in a quiet corner of the Metropolitan, Mrs. Ascott turned the preposterous proposition over in her mind. No doubt the Ramsays were as tired of her eternal flopping from one untenable situation to another as her own people were. In Springdale she would be safely off their hands . . . at least until the sensation of her divorce had subsided. Would her late husband marry the nonchalant co-respondent? Would Herbert Faulkner, with whom she had all but eloped, while Raoul Ascott and the girl were in Egypt . . . But she was not interested in Herbert Faulkner, and she cared not a straw whether Raoul married or pursued his butterfly career, free from the stimulating restrictions of domestic life. Was Griff afraid she would disturb the farcical relations of her late impassioned admirer and the stern-lipped woman who bore his name and made free with his check-book to further her aberrant social ambition? Was it for this that she had been banished to the coal fields of western Illinois—to save Maida Faulkner the annoyance of a divorce and consequent loss of income? Whatever the actuating motive, the thing was done. She had acquiesced without a murmur of protest. This was in keeping with

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her whole nondescript life. Nothing had been worth the effort of opposition. She had never known the stinging contact of human suffering. Oh, to burn her fingers with the flame of living! But Springdale—a hide-bound college town, where divorce is reckoned among the cardinal sins. . . .

VI The Trench Children

I

Lavinia stood in the sun-room, staring perplexedly across the lawn in the direction of Vine Cottage. She was trying to decide a ponderous question. To call on the new tenant . . . or to wait the prescribed two weeks? David and the children felt that a neighbourly visit was already overdue. Probably, Larimore had said at breakfast, Mrs. Ascott knew nothing of the silly custom which prevailed in Springdale, and would think her landlady either hostile or rude. For once in her life Lavinia Trench was uncertain. The new tenant was a woman of the world. Ominous distinction. How could one gauge a neighbour who had crossed the ocean sixteen times and had lived in every European capital from London to Constantinople? She did not wear black. Incomprehensible for a widow. Likely as not, she held Springdale unworthy the display of her expensive weeds. Or perhaps she was saving them for some adequate occasion. Just going to Dr. Schubert's laboratory to work . . . one's old clothes would serve for that. Besides, there were so many new fads about mourning. It might be that taupe was the correct thing. She would write and ask Sylvia about it.

Sylvia was the one member of the family whose opinion was accorded a meed of respect—now that she had gone to Detroit to live. It was too bad that she should have moved to another city, just when a woman who might have been of service to her had come to Springdale. It was always that way. Life offered the great

desideratum—after the wish or need for it had gone by. Life, Lavinia Trench's life, was an endless chain of disappointments. Of this there was no shadow of doubt. David and the children had heard the statement reiterated with such consistent regularity that they failed now to hear it at all—like the noise of the trolley cars on Sherman Avenue, behind the Trench home, that at first made such a deafening clatter.

"You seem to get everything you ask for," her second son, Robert, had once reminded her. "That's more than you can say for the rest of us." Whereat she reeled off such a catalogue of woes that even Bob was silenced.

II

There was something abnormal about the Trench children. Nothing ever went right with them. Sylvia was the college beauty, an exact replica of her mother, and she had been forced in sheer desperation to marry, at twenty-four, the baldheaded professor of chemistry and physics, whom half the girls in town had refused. Larimore was a successful architect, had taken honours at Cornell; but he detested girls and boys. Had his nose in a book most of the time. He might have done things for his sister, if he had not been so steeped in his own morbid fancies. Bob would have brought eligible young men to the house, if he had been the next one in age to Sylvia. Mrs. Trench shuddered when she thought about Bob. It was the culminating tragedy of her badly ordered life.

A good many things made her shudder . . . horrible patches of the past, that had been lived through, somehow. There were the first few years of her married life at Olive Hill, when David worked as a carpenter, and two babies invaded the three-room cottage before her

second anniversary. She had not considered the possibility of children when, after an engagement lasting less than a month, she and David had been married. A little daughter—three weeks older than Ellen's first child! Lavinia made it an occasion for rejoicing. Sent dainty announcements to Bromfield, tied with blue ribbon. But when, after fourteen months, a boy came, she began to question the leap she had made, that tempestuous October day.

The boy was called Larimore, in protest against the unmistakable lineaments of the Trenches that revealed themselves in his pathetic baby face. He was an anaemic child, given to wailing softly when in pain—a sharp contrast to Sylvia's insistent screams. As he grew into boyhood he was quiet and studious, as David had been. Seldom gave his mother cause for anxiety, glutted her maternal pride with his achievements at school, and yet she never quite overcame the feeling that he was an interloper in her family. There were three years of immunity, and then came Robert, the child whom everybody else regarded as a stray. But Lavinia saw in his thick black hair and virile body the materialization of her contempt for David's softness, as it had perpetuated itself in her first son.

There was nothing about Bob that was soft but his skin. And that was another Trench anomaly. Between Lary's curling blond locks and Bob's peach bloom complexion, Sylvia had a desperate time of it, before the period of adolescence when her own sallow cheeks began to clear. Those were the dim prehistoric days when, in Springdale, rouge and lip sticks carried all the sinister implication which had attached, in the Bromfield of Lavinia's day, to the suggested idea that a "nice" girl wanted to marry. There was implicit in each the stigma

of the wanton, and Lavinia had taught her children that, before all else, they must be respectable. Her own powder box was closely guarded, its existence denied with oaths that would have condemned a less righteous soul to perdition.

After David removed to Springdale, as junior member of the firm that had the contract for two new buildings on the college campus, and Vine Cottage had been erected beyond the residence district of the town, three other babies arrived—at perfectly decent intervals. They were all girls. Isabel, like Lary, was given an unequivocal Larimore name, because she was so exactly like her father. She was four years younger than Bob, and the death of these two made a strange break in the family continuity. Mrs. Ascott heard about the Trench children in a manner at once vivid and enlightening.

III

It was the ninth day of her tenancy at Vine Cottage, and she and Dr. Schubert were already old friends. With the exception of a reference to Eileen, whom the quality rather than the content of his allusion marked as his favourite, he had studiously avoided any comment on the Trenches that would serve to divert the free flow of her own sensitive perception. Larimore and Sydney Schubert were of about the same age—had been intimate friends from boyhood. Syd's affection for Lary, at one period of his youth, had overflowed and engulfed Sylvia. But Mrs. Trench had set her face sternly against any such alliance. "The obstacle seems to have been that intangible thing, a discrepancy in age—on the wrong side of the ledger," the physician explained. "*There* is one woman," he stressed the first word extravagantly, his eyes twinkling, "who has the whole scheme of life crystallized.

With most of us, certain problems remain fluid. Mrs. Trench *knows*. The eternal verities don't admit of argument. My boy was only a medical student when he went mooning after Sylvia, but his prospects were good. If he had been born the day before—instead of lagging a stupid sixteen months after the girl—it would have been all right for her to wait ten years for him. As it was, he simply wouldn't do. Mrs. Trench objected to Walter Marksley on entirely different grounds. Mrs. Trench is strong for the moral code, and Walter kept a fairly luxuriant crop of wild oats in his front yard. . . . But my dear, my dear, I'm developing the garrulity that is a sure harbinger of old age. Don't let a word I've been saying serve to bias you in your estimate of your landlady. I assure you, she's a trump."

IV

Judith reflected, on the way home that morning, that if she wanted to get on with Mrs. Trench, she must guard her own questionable past with double zeal. It came to her, with a curious feeling of separation, that she might care what Mrs. Trench thought. The concept was a new one, and she inspected it with interest. But then . . . she had been so desperately lonely, so remote from everything she had known in the past. And she was, as Griff Ramsay suggested, a gregarious animal—recognizing only in its absence her need of the herd. For the sake of Griff and Laura she would endure her exile to the end, and she was, it seemed, dependent on the morally austere woman in the great Colonial house for such human contact as Springdale might offer—human contact which for the first time in her life she craved with poignant longing.

Nanny met her at the door, her face red with laugh-

ter, her ample sides shaking. There had been a gravel fight between Jeff Dutton and one of the Trench children. It appeared to be one of the regular institutions of Vine Cottage.

"You must hurry with your luncheon, Miss Judith, so as not to miss the next round. The little girl was furious. She said Dutton muffed his play, and that was against the rules. She's coming back to settle with him."

Nanny had prepared an unusually tempting repast, in the tiny breakfast room that looked out, with many windows, on the stretch of lawn that separated the two houses, on the little wicket gate in the low stone wall, and the ample kitchen garden beyond the wall, brown and scarred with the first spring spading. The lonely woman viewed, with chill apprehension, the imposing façade of the house, the crisp white curtains that served, with their thin opacity, to conceal all the activity of the Trench home life. A sugar-coated sphinx, that house, guarding its secret soul with a subtle reticence that belied its seeming candour. Larimore Trench had drawn the plans for the new home. Was he that sort of man—or was this another expression of the ubiquitous Lavinia, whom Dutton had characterized as "running the hull ranch"?

There was a commotion in the hall that led from the kitchen to the breakfast room, and Nanny opened the door. She was plainly perplexed. Miss Judith was still a child to her, but she was too instinctively a servant to venture upon the prerogative of her mistress.

"You let me by," a shrill voice piped. "I'm going to tell her, myself."

The housekeeper yielded to a vicious pinch in the rotund cushion of her thigh, and a small parcel of humanity slid adroitly into Mrs. Ascott's field of vision.

Her head was set defiantly on one side, but the dark eyes were inscrutable. A moment only she faltered, tucking in her long under lip and shifting her slight bulk from one foot to the other.

"I broke a window in your garage. It was Jeff's fault. He had no business ducking. How did he know I had a rock in that handful of gravel? Just gravel wouldn't have broken the window. I'm willing to shoulder the blame, and pay for the glass out of my allowance—if you'll make Jeff put it in. I can swipe that much putty from my papa's shop. And—and don't let Jeff Dutton snitch on me—to Lary."

She finished with an excited gasp, and stood awaiting the inevitable.

"Come here, little girl. Don't mind about the pane. Are you Eileen Trench?"

"Me? Mercy, no!" Astonishment dissolved into mirth, mirth that savoured of derision. The next instant the laugh died and the high forehead was puckered in a frown of swift displeasure. She came a step nearer, her thin brown hand plucking at her skirt. "I shouldn't have laughed that way, as if you'd said something silly. It goes hard with me to say I'm sorry—because—usually I'm not. I hate lying, just to be polite. Eileen'll take a lickin' any day, before she'll say she's sorry. But Sylvia says it's better to apologize and be done with it. And I guess it does save time."

The ideas appeared chaotic, as if the child were in the throes of a mighty change in ethical standards. Judith looked at her, a whimsical fancy taking possession of her mind that she was watching some fantastic mime—that this was no flesh-and-blood child, but an owl masquerading in wren's attire.

"My dear old doctor mentioned Sylvia and Lary and Eileen. Would you mind telling me your name?"

"Theodora."

"Theodora—the gift of God."

"Yes, and it was a rummy gift. Jeff Dutton says the Lord hung a lemon on my mother's Christmas tree. I was supposed to come a boy—there'd been too many girls already—and they were going to name me after my uncle Theodore. Jeff thinks I cried so much because I was disappointed at being just a girl. I guess I cried, all right. My brother, Bob, named me 'Schubert's Serenade' because he and Lary had me 'neath their casement every night till two o'clock. Mamma's room was where your library is now. I like this house lots better than ours."

"Do you remember this one? I thought the new house was built five years ago."

Theodora turned questioning eyes upon her. Then, in a flash, she understood.

"Dear me, you have an idea I'm about six years old. Strangers always do. I can't help it that I never grow any bigger. I was twelve last Christmas, and I'm first year Prep. It's horrid to be so little. People never have any respect for you. Eileen's tall as a broom—but nobody has much respect for her, either."

"Tell me about Eileen. Dr. Schubert is fond of her, I believe."

"Yes, he sees good in her. He's about the only one who does. She was sixteen last Sunday, and she's third year Prep. Goes into college next fall, if she don't flunk again. She's getting too big for mamma's slipper, and I don't know what is going to become of her. She's been ugly as sin, ever since mamma heard a Chautauqua lec-

turer say you had to go in for technique. You know, Eileen plays the violin. And when mamma shuts her up and makes her practice—she gets even by making her fiddle swear. It says 'hell' and 'damn' and some worse ones, just as plain. And when she's mad, her eyes get as yellow as cat's eyes. You never saw yellow eyes, did you?"

"My own look that way, at times—when I'm ill or out of sorts."

"But they're the loveliest—like gray violets!" She looked deep into Mrs. Ascott's eyes, and her own kindled with admiration. "Dr. Schubert told us yours were like Lary's. But they aren't, a bit. His are light brown. That barely saves him from being a Trench."

Manifestly Lavinia had impressed on her family the advantage of looking like the Larimores. And yet, Judith thought she had never seen a finer looking man than David Trench—not so well groomed as his son, and with the gait of a man perennially tired, but with a face that Fra Angelico would have loved to paint.

V

When the elfin child had gone, in response to the ringing of a great bell on the distant campus, Mrs. Ascott sat a long while in smiling silence. Not in years had she been so entertained. Bit by bit she added the child's revelations to the broken comments of her garrulous gardener. The Duttons had been neighbours of the Trenches in Olive Hill, when Jeff and Dave were fellow workmen, and before Jeff's baleful visit to the "Jag Insti-toot" that robbed him of his prowess as a brick mason, along with the appetite for undiluted whiskey. Mrs. Dutton "wasn't very friendly" because her fortunes had declined until she was compelled to serve as laundress

and house-maid to Mrs. Trench's tenants. But there was a time when she and her husband were glad of a refuge in the rooms above the garage. This small brick structure, it transpired, had been David's work shop, and here Lary had made his first architectural drawings.

Theodora's prattle fairly bristled with Lary. Whatever his mother might think of him, in his little sister's eyes he was the one flawless being. It was he who had supervised the furnishing of Vine Cottage, for a certain Professor Ferguson, a testy little Scot in charge of the department of biology at the college. And Lary and his mother had almost broken heads over some of the details.

Everything about the house was exquisite. Judith thought she knew what Lary would be like—the man who could limit himself to a single dull blue and yellow vase for the library mantel. The external appearance of the cottage had promised fustian . . . the fish-scale ornament above the bay-window, the elaborate carvings between the veranda pillars, the somewhat fussy pergola that covered the gravel walk from the kitchen to the garage.

Bare vines were everywhere, swelling with sap and viridescent with eager buds that strove with their armour of winter scales, although it was not yet the end of March. Beds of narcissus and tulips gave promise of early bloom, and already the yellow and white crocus blossoms were starring the withered bluegrass of the front lawns. There was an unwritten law that the lattice which screened the vegetable garden must never carry anything but cypress and Japanese morning glories, and that potatoes must be planted east of the pergola. There were other unwritten "musts" that came to light, day by day, all of them having to do with the garden, over which apparently Mrs. Trench had retained control.

"But, Lordee, you don't have to pay no attention to her," Dutton sniffed, when a rather arbitrary ruling was undergoing vicarious transmission. "Treat her like Ferguson did, the fust time she butted in. It's *your* house."

Between Dutton and Theodora, it would not be long until all the Trench skeletons had been dragged from their closets and set dancing in hilarious abandon, for the amusement of the new tenant. They were not real people, the Duttons and the Trenches, with their unfamiliar life-experience. She had never envisaged anyone like them. It was all a part of the dream she had cherished—a place she had never heard of, where she could lose herself . . . and forget. . . .

VII Lavinia Pays a Call

I

In the pigeonholes of her memory, Mrs. Ascott had stowed a collection of unanswered questions, neatly tabulated and reserved for possible solution. Why had her marriage with Raoul been the inevitable failure she knew it must be, almost from the beginning? Would they have found each other if there had been children? Would her own life have been more satisfactory, had her mother married for love and not for social position? And now she added another, trivial as compared with these, yet quite as elusive: Would Mrs. Trench have waited the prescribed two weeks for a first call on a new neighbour, had her small daughter failed to report the broken window—and other things?

Whatever the answer, the stubborn fact remained that Mrs. David Trench did call, on Friday afternoon. She left a correctly engraved card on the vestibule table, and sat erect on the edge of her chair. She wore an austere tailored suit, patent leather boots that called attention to the trim shape of her feet, and a flesh-tinted veil of fine silk net with flossy black dots. In the full light of the south window, she might have passed for thirty-six. Barring a conspicuous hardness of the mouth, her features were excellent. The hair that lay in palpably artificial curls along the line of her velvet hat was as black as it is possible for Caucasian hair to be, and the eyes were coldly piercing—as if appraisal were their chief

function. But her speech. . . . Cloying sweetness trickled through her words, as she assured her tenant that they were destined to be friends. She would come and care for Mrs. Ascott if she should fall ill—so far from home and mother. She was a famous nurse. Dr. Schubert would bear her witness. Her heart ached as she thought how desolate must be the life of a young widow.

"Yet," she added, "it is an enviable state, after all—when one has passed the first shock of grief. Like everything in life, it has its compensations. You don't have to bother with a man, and there is no danger of your being an old maid." She pronounced the last words as if she were referring to the plague or small-pox. "The West must look strange to you," she hurried on, "a little town, too, after spending all your life in New York and the great cities of Europe."

"I have spent very little time in New York," her tenant corrected. "When I was married I went to Philadelphia to live—such time as we were not travelling. And I was scarcely away from Rochester until I was fifteen."

"Rochester! You don't tell me! We went to Rochester for shopping and the theatre, as people in Springdale go to St. Louis. What a little world it is, after all. Did you ever hear of a town called Bromfield?"

Judith searched her memory. At last she had it. She had driven to that village more than once with her grandfather, Dr. Holden. She recalled one visit, when the sleigh was insecurely anchored in front of a house on Main Street, while she curled up for a nap in the great fur robes on the seat. The horse, arriving at the mental state which demanded dinner, before the physician was

ready to leave the house, had untied the hitching strap and cantered unconcernedly to the livery stable where he was in the habit of being fed.

"You don't mean that you were the little girl in the sleigh!" Mrs. Trench's eyes were scintillating with astonished interest. "I'll show you the account of it—in the Bromfield Sentinel. I have a complete file of the little home paper. And it will surprise you to know that the man your grandfather was calling on was Robert Larimore, my father. He died of brain hemorrhage, that same night. All the Larimores go that way—suddenly. Dr. Holden was called, when my father's mother died, but it was all over before the telegram reached him. And your grandmother . . . she must have been the Mrs. Holden who did so much work among the poor."

"Yes, my parents left Rochester to escape from her pets. That, of course, is only a family joke. My father spent a good many years in South America, and I was left with my grandparents. One of my brothers was born in Bolivia and the other in the Argentine. I didn't see them until they were six and ten years old."

Mrs. Trench was not listening. Should she. . . or should she not? In the end, she did. "Mrs. Ascott, I know it sounds like a foolish question—a city the size of Rochester—but you said a moment ago that as a child you knew everybody. Did you ever hear of a family named Fournier?"

"The people who kept the delicatessen, around the corner from my grandfather's private sanitarium? Yes, I knew them well."

"Was there a daughter—Lettie or Arletta—some such name? She'd be a woman of about forty-five by this time, I should think."

"No, she was the niece, a wild, highstrung girl who gave them a good deal of trouble. She ran away and was married, at sixteen—some worthless fellow from upstate, who afterward tried to get out of it."

"Worthless?" Mrs. Trench bristled unaccountably.

"That was the way Lettie's people regarded him. Their little boy and I played together, as children. My grandmother took a lively interest in Lettie, as she did in all wayward girls who found no sympathy at home. I remember she devoted a good deal of her time to the patching up of quarrels between Lettie and her husband—and keeping peace in the family, when he was in Rochester with them."

"Was there anything—peculiar—about their marriage?"

"Lettie was romantic. I believe that was all. It happened before I was born; but I remember that there was always talk. Grandma Holden compelled her to confess her marriage, to save her good name. And the foolish part of it was that she and the youth were married under assumed names—"

"The boy—how old is he?"

"By a very amusing coincidence, I happen to know that, too. I couldn't tell you the ages of my brothers, with any degree of certainty. But Fournier Stone and I were born the same night, in adjoining rooms of Dr. Holden's sanitarium. He arrived early in the evening, and I a little before dawn. By that much I escaped the 'April Fool' that was so offensive to him. I shall be twenty-seven next Friday."

Mrs. Trench made swift mental calculation, and her stiffly pursed lips uttered one inexplicable sentence:

"Thank God, my people have always been respectable."

II

Lavinia went home, her whole being in turmoil. She had not seen Bromfield since the day when she and David packed their scant belongings and turned to seek oblivion or happiness in Olive Hill. With the exception of the Sentinel and her sister-in-law's verbose letters, she knew little of the course of events in that quiet back-water that had environed her stagnant girlhood. And Ellen left large gaps in the village news, gaps that could be filled, inadequately, by inference or imagination. That Calvin had a child, this much she knew. That he had spent most of his time in Rochester, prior to his father's long illness and death, this, too, had been conveyed to her by a random personal notice now and then. But that he and Lettie had gotten on badly—had quarreled. . . . Cruel joy burned in her eyes. They had had recourse to the neighbours, to smooth out their family affairs. Whatever unpleasantness she had had, within the four walls of her own home, none of the neighbours had been permitted to suspect that her life was not all she wished it to be. The neighbours. What kind of woman was Mrs. Stone, that she would. . . . But Lavinia knew, at last, what kind of woman Mrs. Stone was. She reflected that Lettie's marriage certificate probably had not been framed in gold, as hers was, and conspicuously displayed on the wall of her bedroom. The past ten years, the Stones had prospered, and Calvin had succeeded his father as president of the bank. Ellen and Lettie were on calling terms. She would write Ellen. . . .

In memory she went back to the days when Vine Cottage was new, when to her fell the task of choosing a line of social progress in the clique-ridden town of Springdale. She had three small children, ample excuse for a

little dalliance. And the cottage, with two hundred feet of ground to be transformed into a marvellous garden, was a little way out—a double reason for delay, when David urged her to return the calls of the Eastern Star ladies, who had been most gracious. "I don't want to make any mistake," she told him. "If you once get in with the wrong set. . . ." David didn't know what she meant.

III

Society in Springdale, such society as counted for anything, was divided by a clearly marked line of cleavage, with Mrs. Henry Marksley dominating one stratum and Mrs. Thomas Henderson the other. The Hendersons were leaders in the intellectual life of the community and staunch pillars in the Presbyterian church. Lavinia was glad that David had been brought up a Presbyterian—or rather, that that happened to be the fashionable church in Springdale. When it came to matters of principle, it was not easy to manipulate David.

The Marksleys seldom went to church. On the other hand, Mr. Marksley stood ready with three contracts, before David had finished the work on the campus, contracts which enabled him to reap the benefit of his labour, instead of delivering two-thirds of the profits into the hand of the senior partner. Mrs. Marksley was particularly anxious to rally to her standard the best looking and aggressive young women of the town. She was trying to live down the latest escapades of her husband and her eldest daughter, Adelaide. Such a woman as Mrs. David Trench would be of service to her—and she could make the association correspondingly profitable. But at the psychological moment Mrs. Marksley went into temporary social exile, ceasing all activity until after the birth of a son. The hiatus, together with certain

whispered stories concerning Adelaide, drove Lavinia to Mrs. Henderson and the Browning Club. It was a step she never regretted. Within a year she was able to send to the Bromfield Sentinel an account of a spirited business meeting, at which "young Mrs. Trench" had been elected secretary, over the heads of two rival candidates whose husbands were in the college faculty. Mrs. Henderson was perpetual president, and membership in the club gave just the right intellectual and cultural stamp.

Years afterward, Tom Henderson and Walter Marksley began an exciting race for Sylvia's favour—courtship that came to nothing, as all Sylvia's courtship did. And now, the boy whose advent had settled, once and for all, Mrs. Trench's social destiny, was playing around with Eileen, taking her to and from school in his car and ruining her digestion with parfait and divinity. David and Larimore—to his mother he was always Larimore, never Lary—had set their faces stubbornly against this flattering attachment. There had been no scandal in the Marksley family in recent years, and no other objection that a sensible person could name. But how to persuade them. . . . Mrs. Ascott! To be sure. It was providential that she had come to Springdale at such an opportune time. She would see things in their true light—being a woman of the world. If only Larimore could be induced to call on her. She was—m-m-m, yes, nineteen months older than Larimore. That made it safe. A young widow. . . . But Larimore Trench had never been interested in any woman. She would trump up some reason for sending him over, that very evening. She must have Mrs. Ascott's assistance. Eileen's future—her own future, for reasons as yet but dimly apprehended—was at stake.

IV

But Theodora spared her the trouble. Judith was finishing her lonely dinner when the telephone rang. "I'm bringing my brother over to see you. I told him you wanted some changes made in the living-room." In a muffled whisper she added: "Of course you didn't; but I'll explain. We'll be there in a minute." Before she could reply, the receiver had clicked into its hook, and the two were seen emerging from the house.

"Mrs. Ascott, this is Lary. It's the lamp shade, the one on the newel post—you know—that's the colour of ripe apricots."

She darted from the vestibule into the wide living-room, from which a stairway ascended to the floor above, and turned on the light, although the day was not yet gone.

"You don't like it?" Larimore Trench asked. "This colour scheme, I know, is a bit personal."

"Why, child, when did I say such a thing? I don't recall discussing the lamp shade with you."

"I didn't exactly tell him you said that you objected to it. I said I *thought* you did. You see, mamma told us at dinner that you agreed with her in everything. And she has always said that for this room the lamp shade must be rose pink."

"I'm sorry to disagree with your mother, but I should not like rose pink."

"Mrs. Ascott," Lary began, his clear brown eyes mock-serious, "I must warn you that Miss Theodora Trench is a conscienceless little fibber. It isn't her only fault, but it is her most serious one."

"Lary! To think of *you*—giving me a black eye, right before Lady Judith! When I haven't had a chance

to make good with her. If mamma or Eileen. . . .
But *you!*"

"I couldn't make either of them any blacker than they already are, dearie. And I didn't mean to humiliate you. But you mustn't begin by fibbing to Mrs. Ascott."

She hung her head, crimson blotches staining the sal-low cheeks. After a moment she looked up, and the angry fire had been extinguished by shining tears.

"I guess it's better this way. Now Lady Judith knows what kind of a family we are. You can't get disappointed in people if you know the worst of them first."

V

It transpired that within the Trench home the new tenant had already been established as "Lady Judith," a name which Theodora afterward explained, with documentary and graphic evidence to substantiate her none too credible word. A long time ago Lary had given her a book of fairy tales, the heroine of which was Lady Judith Dinglewood—beloved of all the bold knights, but destined for the favour of the king's son. Lary had adorned the title-page with a miniature of the beautiful lady, and had added a colophon showing her in the robes of a royal bride. Theodora could recite every word of the romantic tale before she was old enough to read. She had gone to sleep with that book in her arms, as Sylvia had insisted on taking her best wax doll to bed. The moment she espied the name, Judith Ascott, on the lease that Griffith Ramsay had signed, she decided that her Lady Judith had come true.

It mattered little that the new occupant of the name bore not the slightest resemblance to the two little water colour drawings. Lary could paint a new Lady Judith,

now that he knew what she really looked like. It was not his fault that he had made the eyes black. He had to do that, to appease mamma and Sylvia—whose standards of beauty were rigidly fixed. But eyes that could be blue or grey, or flecked with brown, as they were this evening. . . . How much more interesting than eyes that were always the same colour! The hair, in that new picture which Lary must paint, would be pale chestnut, with golden glints where the light fell on it. And the mouth—the sweetest mouth! She told Lary about it as they went home, through the close dark of a wonderful spring night. Had he noticed Mrs. Ascott's mouth? He had.

VIII Hal Marksley Intrudes

I

April brought a break in the stolid serenity of Elm Street. The big house across from the Trench property began to manifest signs of awakening life. For almost a year it had stood vacant, with only a caretaker to guard it against the depredations of Springdale's budding youth. Paint and pruning shears had scarcely achieved the miracle of external transformation when a consignment of furniture arrived, via the Oriental express and San Francisco. This much Theodora discovered as she risked her fragile bones among the packing cases in the reception hall. She had contrived to make out four letters, N-I-M-S, in great smears of glossy black ink on several of the boxes. That hardly sounded like a name.

"Mamma says it will be time enough to find out about them when they move in," she complained to Mrs. Ascott. "I heard her ask the agent—and she was mad as hops when he refused to tell her."

"Delightfully mysterious, Theo. Perhaps some European monarch has grown tired of his crown, and is coming to live across the street from us."

"Maybe it's the Emperor of China. I saw the loveliest great red dragon—where one of the cases had broken open and the burlap was torn off. Oh—" in sudden fright, "don't let Lary know I pried."

She had perceived her brother's approach, by some subtle sense that bound them. He and Eileen were crossing the lawn with noiseless steps and Theodora's

back was turned. When they reached the front gate, Mrs. Ascott gave greeting:

"What does one do in Springdale, these glorious spring evenings?"

"One goes to the show, if one has an amiable brother." To Eileen's suggestion, Larimore added: "Won't you come along, Mrs. Ascott? Vaudeville and pictures—not much of an attraction; but it might amuse you. My mother is entertaining the ladies of the missionary society this evening, and she doesn't want us around."

"Yes," Theodora added, "and Mrs. Stevens is coming. She and Eileen don't speak, since the 'ossified episode.' You know, Lady Judith, that's all that saved you from being invited to join the Self Culture Club. Mamma belongs. She was one of the charter members—reads the magazine, like it was the Bible—and she meant it for a compliment to offer your name for membership. But Mrs. Stevens was so furious at Eileen that she tabled all the names mamma submitted."

"You wouldn't have gone in for that rubbish anyway," Eileen defended herself. "Mrs. Stevens makes me tired. She hasn't a thing in her library but reference works. And mamma holds her up to Theo and me as a bright example. Tells us that we can't expect to get culture unless we look things up. Ina Stevens does that, and she has facts hanging all over her. She's as prissy as her mother."

"But what was the 'ossified episode'?" Judith asked, recognizing one of Larimore Trench's expressions, wherewith Theodora's speech was frequently adorned.

"Humph, I got caught on the word, in rhetoric class. Thought it meant something about kissing, and the whole class hooted at me. Ina was at home, sick, that day,

and Theo and I went over in the evening to take her credit card. Her marks were loads better'n mine, and Mrs. Stevens swelled up so about it that I couldn't help telling her that my grandfather was expected to die, because all his bones had ossified. And, Mrs. Ascott, both of them—Ina and her mother—fell for it. Mrs. Stevens said it was a dreadful disease, but she had known one old lady who lived three years in that condition. I looked blank as a grindstone; but Theo had to go and snigger. And after we went home, Mrs. Stevens looked it up—and 'phoned mamma that I had to apologize, or she wouldn't let Ina chum with me any more. I don't care. I like Kitten Henderson best, any way."

She turned to look anxiously up the street, as if she were more than half expecting some one, while Judith went into the house to get her hat.

II

The performance had been going on for an hour when the four entered the theatre, groping their way down the dark aisle to a row of unoccupied seats at the left side. The stage was being set for a troupe of Japanese tumblers, and the interval was bridged by news films and an animated cartoon. To Judith this form of entertainment was new. Raoul could tolerate nothing but the sprightliest comedy. With the Ramsays and Herbert Faulkner she had tried to find surcease in grand opera and the symphony. Once in London she and her mother had taken refuge from the rain in a cinema theatre where, on a wide screen, a company of fat French women chased a terrified little man—who had loved not wisely but too often—through the familiar streets of the Latin Quarter, overturning flower stands and vegetable carts, falling in scrambled heaps that writhed with a

brave showing of lingerie, untangling themselves and scampering to fresh disaster, when they discovered that the object of their jealous rage had somehow slipped unhurt from the mass. Mrs. Denslow was disgusted. Judith was only bored.

But this bit of screen craft was different. On an expanse of dazzling white a single black dot appeared, paused a breathless moment and went tripping about in a zigzag dance, spilling smaller dots as it went. These resolved themselves into figures that stalked about with the jerky motion of automata. A ghostly hand passed over the picture, and it stood revealed a plenum of regularly arranged dots. With another wave of the wraithlike hand, the dots began to move slowly to and fro, advancing and retreating until they assumed the outlines of a great picture, "Washington Crossing the Delaware." Other pictures were produced by means of those same dots. But Mrs. Ascott, who had never before watched the vibrant changes of an animated cartoon, found it necessary to close her eyes to relieve the strain. And then . . . some one was leaning over her shoulder, heavy with the odour of a spent cigar, and a full, authoritative voice was saying:

"Come on, Eileen. The whole bunch is down in front. Ina and Jimmy are there, and Kitten and Dan."

"Hal Marksley, if you can't come to the house for me—" the girl said petulantly, but she stepped to the seat of her chair and vaulted nimbly over the back. Theodora moved to the vacant place beside her Lady Judith and the play went on.

III

At the gate, Lary kissed his little sister and sent her home, going into the house with Mrs. Ascott. There

was no need of so much as a nod to assure him that the evening was not yet finished. She wanted to ask him about Dr. Schubert—the tragedy that had mellowed and sweetened him. But the revelation would come in due time. Instead, she demanded to know the significance of Indian Summer. Only that morning the old physician had remarked—when she told him of Dutton's warning—"We hop from snow to sweat, out here in Illinois,"—that one could endure the heat if one kept constantly in mind that after frost there would be Indian Summer.

Indian Summer. She had read a sentimental essay, years ago. . . . April—the arrogant, reckless abundance of Youth. August—the passionate heat of Love. October—the killing frost of Sorrow. And after that, the golden peace of Indian Summer. In her part of the world there was no such division of seasons. Yet the figures had attached themselves to the walls of her memory by tenacious tentacles. For her there had been neither sorrow nor peace . . . just the bald monotony of a life that had been regulated by the artificial standards of her mother or her husband. She was so deadly tired of it all. And her work at the laboratory had not proved absorbing. It was too easy . . . the copying of formulæ and an occasional hand at an experiment that might be dangerous. But she knew that none of them would be dangerous. Dr. Schubert was too cautious to permit her even that zest. Sydney Schubert, the son, who specialized in diseases of children, she hardly knew. An epidemic of scarlet fever was raging in the mining towns of Sutton and Olive Hill, and he was away from home most of the time.

"In order to appreciate Syd, you must know the tragedy of his boyhood," Lary began. "It was more terrible

for his parents, of course. But to a sensitive boy who had an instinctive love of beauty—quite aside from his natural devotion to his mother. . . . Mrs. Schubert was without doubt the most beautiful woman either of us had ever seen. Not the type my mother admires. And it may not have been the kind that would last. She was too fair and exquisite.”

“And she died, while the bloom was still fresh?” Judith asked.

“No, she lived eight years. We never knew how the thing happened . . . a breeze that ruffled her clothing too close to the grate, or it may have been that her veil caught fire from an exposed gas flame. She was dressed to go out, and was waiting for the doctor in the great hall of their house, when she discovered that her clothing was ablaze. She wrapped herself in a carriage robe that happened to be lying on the settle; but she was horribly burned. One side of her face was disfigured beyond recognition. Fortunately the eyes were saved. It was after her recovery that Dr. Schubert had the pipe organ installed in the hall, to occupy her time, for she never went out, and at home she always covered her scars with a veil of white chiffon. Syd and Bob and I took turns at pumping the organ for her, before the days of electric motors, and she taught all of us music. One afternoon, three years ago, they found her at the organ . . . her head resting on the upper manual. They thought at first she was asleep.”

“I’m glad she went that way,” Judith said, her throat tight with emotion.

Lary might have resumed, but he was arrested by boisterous laughter, out on the street. Eileen and her friends were going by, and young Marksley was saying, with a good-natured sneer: “Cornell—nix on Cornell for

mine. The kid and I have this college business all doped out. She's going to cut this little Presbyterian joint, next fall, and we're both going to Valparaiso University. Greatest college on earth! Place where they teach you to dissolve the insoluble, to transmute the immutable and unscrew the inscrutable. I'm going to take commercial law, and Eileen can go on with her music. . . ." The voices died away, as the group turned the corner beyond Vine Cottage.

"I wish my sister wouldn't—" Lary checked himself, colouring.

"I shouldn't take it too seriously. Such school boy and girl affairs seldom come to anything. Eileen's a stubborn child. I wouldn't oppose her . . . openly."

IV

It proved a mistake, letting Eileen go away with Hal and the others. At midnight she tried to let herself in noiselessly at the side door, found it unaccountably locked, and was forced to ring the bell. There was a scene at the breakfast table, reported to Mrs. Ascott by Theodora, with dramatic touches. Scenes were not uncommon, but this one was different. It developed along unexpected lines. No one had taken into account the possibility of Mrs. Trench as a bulwark of defence for Eileen. But that wary ally was not wont to fight in the open. She was so accustomed to storming the postern gate, that she was likely to creep around to the rear of her objective, when the front portal stood open, undefended. This morning she had for subterfuge the highly practical business advantage of cultivating Hal Marksley's friendship. Hal's father, as the whole town knew, was preparing to build a palatial mansion in the parklike addition he had recently laid out, at the western

limit of Springdale's residential section. Six architects had been invited to compete for the plans. It was important that Larimore Trench be the victor. This would place the contract for construction automatically in David's hands. But David and Lary wanted to eliminate themselves from the competition, and admonish Hal that it would be advisable for him to take his affection elsewhere. At this, Lavinia forgot her prudence—delivered a direct assault on her husband, which might have been but an echo of the thing she had been saying to him at regular intervals for twenty-eight years:

"Yes, and you'd insult Hal—spoil Eileen's chance, *the way my father spoiled mine*—just because a young man has money and knows how to show a girl a good time! I don't intend to go through another such experience as I had with Sylvia."

The reference to Sylvia was beside the mark. She had not intended to betray her eagerness for an early marriage for her second daughter.

IX News From Bromfield

I

Lavinia was finding her tenant increasingly useful—the wicket gate an open sesame to many of the difficult problems for which she had been wont to search in vain the pages of the Self Culture Magazine. A development watched by her son with incredulous wonder. Hitherto Lavinia Trench had believed nothing that was conveyed to her by word of mouth. "She's a pure visuel," Dr. Schubert had sought to explain. "She gets her mental concepts through her eyes." But Lary knew that that was not all of it. His mother held an enormous respect for the printed word. She wanted one of her sons to be a writer. That would reflect real credit on the family. Her own inability to form fluid sentences only increased her admiration for those unseen masters whose thoughts and experiences had received the accolade of printer's ink. True, she had many times appeared over her own signature, in the clumsily edited columns of the Bromfield Sentinel—when there was a chance to weave into the story some reference to Larimore's triumphs at Cornell, Sylvia's social conquests or Bob's athletic achievements. But to get things published . . . and paid for. . . . This last comment always sent Lary flying from the room. She would probably not take any stock in the things he wrote, even if she read them in print. They were so at variance with all her established convictions.

On a certain Thursday morning she made occasion to

call on Mrs. Ascott, the newly arrived copy of the *Sentinel* in her hand. Her dark sallow cheeks showed hectic splotches, and her eyes flared and dimmed with the emotion she was trying to conceal. She had not written the story on the front page of the Bromfield paper. Her fancy's most ingenious flight could not have fabricated anything one half so . . . gratifying. So terrible, she amended, to her own soul. But the real, the usually submerged Lavinia, knew that the former word was the right one.

"You remember the boy, Fournier Stone, that you used to play with when you were a little girl in Rochester," she began tensely. "Read that."

The story was told with all the crass vulgarity and offensiveness of small town journalism. The bank examiner had paid an unexpected visit to the Bromfield National bank—because of certain stories that had been circulated concerning young Stone's extravagance in Rochester and Buffalo. It was found that a large gap between the bank's records and the actual cash on hand had been bridged by spurious paper that implied the additional crime of forgery. This, it transpired, was not Fournier Stone's first offence. In the past he had fled to his mother for assistance; but now Mrs. Stone was critically ill, and he had not dared to tell her of his dilemma.

"To think of a mother shielding her son in such rascality!" to which Lavinia added, with snapping satisfaction, "But what could you expect of such a mother?"

The account closed with the statement that Mrs. Stone had suffered a relapse, because of the shock of her son's arrest, and for several hours her life was despaired of. The culprit was released, under heavy bond, and was constantly at his mother's bedside.

II

Saturday brought a letter from Ellen Larimore, with further details. Fournier Stone had disappeared—walked out of the house, in the clothes of one of the servants, right past the secret service man who was there to trap him. It was thought that he had gone to Canada. His mother was in a desperate condition. "Of course," Ellen added, "we don't know a thing for certain. I talked to Calvin this morning, and the poor man is distracted. But most people here think he might have set the boy a better example. I never forgot the day you told me it was too risky to marry a man who drank and gambled. What if it was Larimore that was a fugitive from justice! Aren't you thankful that you married David instead of Calvin? I've had an idea for a long time that you got wind of the affair with Lettie, and threw Calvin over, in a jealous huff. Now I see your wisdom. Oh, I almost forgot to tell you that when they came to look up Fournier's records, in Rochester, it came out that he is six months older than we thought he was. There are a lot of things about Calvin Stone's marriage that some of us older people would like to find out about." Lavinia set her teeth hard, and a yellow pallor replaced the flush of indignant pleasure that had accompanied the reading of the letter . . . up to this point. She had intended to show the letter to David; but when she came to the mention of her wisdom in the choice of a husband, she wavered. That last sentence brought her to an abrupt decision. She burned the letter—and repeated such parts of it as would fit in with a half formed plan in her own mind.

David was profoundly sorry for the Stones. Their misfortunes helped to ease the pain in his own heart, a

pain that had never been lulled since the black day when Bob Trench's dripping body was taken from the river. It was his mother who had urged him to compete for one more trophy at the annual college field meet. To David it seemed that his wife cared more for Bob's ribbons and foolish little silver cups than for all Lary's scholarships and medals. He had never connected these spectacular mementoes with the boastings in the Bromfield Sentinel, and their possible effect on certain of the old friends, whose children had not distinguished themselves. Providence, it now appeared, had been kind in the untimely taking off of his son. Such disgrace as Fournier Stone had brought upon his parents would be harder to bear. In David's limited vocabulary respectability had no place. But principle loomed large. It was the thing Fournier Stone had done, not the newspaper account of it, that mattered.

X Eileen Seeks Counsel

I

Mrs. Ascott went out into the garden after breakfast to watch the transfer of tomato plants from the cold frames beside the garage to the loamy bed that bordered the west wall. Dutton had explained to her that nothing would thrive against the high board fence that shut the grounds from the street, at the east side of the garden—on account of the afternoon sun—and that these tomatoes would grow six feet high and would support their fruit above the stone wall . . . if the suckers were kept picked off. She wondered what suckers were, and how the afternoon sun had acquired such a sinister reputation.

She had not slept, and the April air was cool and refreshing. Mamma and the boys were safely installed in a Paris apartment. Papa had closed the big house at Pelham, taking two of the best trained servants with him to the city establishment on Riverside Drive, and was happily engrossed in the Wall Street fight for further millions—secure from the annoyance of family intrusion. She had several letters and one cablegram. How remote it all seemed, how like the hazy memory of another existence! Two months ago she was trying to forget Raoul, his amiable as well as his maddeningly offensive side. Now she seldom thought of him at all. His personality had lost its definite line and mass. Even his form was growing nebulous. She could not remember what it was that he particularly disliked for breakfast . . . and whether he was growing alarmingly stout

or thin when he went away to Egypt with Hilda Travers.

It was strange that she should have forgotten. Her life with him had been made up of just such things as these. She searched herself for an explanation, as the gardener rambled on, his words scarce reaching her consciousness. Slowly the imponderable thoughts assembled themselves, fashioning for her a shadow picture of her remote childhood. She was in the old kitchen at Rochester and her grandmother Holden was baking cookies for the slum children. There on the marble slab lay the great mass of yellow dough that so tempted her eager fingers. More than once she had seized a breathless opportunity, while grandma's back was turned, to thrust an index finger far down into its golden softness. And behold! The mass had come together, leaving scarce a trace of the deep impression she had made.

Was she as plastic as dough, and had her husband gone from her life without leaving an impression? There must be something more . . . something that had not worked out with precision in their case. Did not that same yielding substance take on the fairly permanent shapes of lions and camels, dancing girls and roosters with arching tails? Perhaps Raoul had neglected to bake the dough. Was she still an impressionable girl, for all her tragic experience?

II

The wicket gate opened and Eileen came towards her. The slim shoulders drooped carelessly and there was a sullen look about the too voluptuous mouth. Mrs. Ascott noticed for the first time that Eileen's mouth was like her mother's. All the rest of her was, as Theodora put it, "pure, unadulterated Trench" . . . except-

ing, of course, the eyes, which were amber or vicious yellow, according to her mood. Lary had his father's mouth; but had compromised with his mother on the question of eyes. Lavinia abhorred compromises, albeit she had learned to accept them as if they had been of her own choosing.

The girl stood in rebellious indecision, a few feet from the tomato bed. Then, as if she had made up her mind to do the thing . . . and take the consequences, she came swiftly forward, put an arm around Judith's waist and kissed her full on the mouth. It had been so long since any one had kissed her! The lips were speaking now, the tone low and vibrant with pleading.

"You don't mind, do you? If you only knew how I adore you! I have sat at my window and watched you—and wondered about you—and wanted to kiss you, till my mouth ached."

A thrill went through the woman's usually tranquil body. Here was passion, susceptibility, imagination. She had not dreamed of such intensity in a girl so young. And this was the girl Larimore Trench had begged her to influence, to mould into some shape of his choosing—a shape that would be utterly displeasing to her mother.

"Can you come into the house with me? It's only a little after eight. You won't be late for chapel if you start at half-past."

"I'm in no hurry. Hal's coming by for me with the car. He'll be on the campus five minutes before he started, if our old moth-eaten policeman happens to be looking the other way. I framed up the best looking excuse for a morning call . . . and now I don't need it. You invited me in—just like that! It's always the way. If I have my gun loaded, there isn't any bear."

"Did you think you needed a pretext?"

"I couldn't be sure. And with you . . . it's too important to take chances. I've been feeling my way, ever since you came. I can't go dancing in, as Theo does. She is like mamma. You simply can't snub that kid."

The pretext was the revelation of the mystery-house across the way. Hal had told her all about it, after they left Ina and Kitten and their escorts. The owner of the carved dragon was Hal's sister, Adelaide Nims. There had been a former marriage, about the time of Hal's birth, a most unsavoury affair. Adelaide was seventeen at the time, and the reluctant husband was the divorced partner of one of Henry Marksley's affinities. The Marksleys, père and mère, had been separated three times. Eileen and Hal agreed that it was indecent for people who despised each other to live together. Still, if his parents had not made up that last time, there would have been no Hal. This would have been calamity for Eileen.

The present Mrs. Nims was little known in Springdale, having lived abroad for almost twenty years. Her first husband, in Eileen's piquant phrase, "had chucked her" after a few months—as a man usually does when he is dragooned into a distasteful marriage. There had been other marriages, "without benefit of clergy," the details of which were suppressed in Springdale. Indeed coming to light only in connection with a divorce or two wherein Adelaide had figured as the reprehensible other woman. She had hair like polished mahogany and melting brown eyes, a skin like the petals of a Victoria Regia, at dawn of the morning after the lily's opening, before the sun has tinged its creamy white with the faint rose that is destined to run the colour gamut to rich purplish red. She and Syd Schubert vied with each other in the number of instruments they could play; but she had made

her great success with the 'cello, an instrument whose playing revealed to the best possible advantage the slim sensual grace of her body.

It was in a London music hall that Reginald Nims, younger son of a peer, had fallen beneath the weight of her manifold charms and had married her—to the dismay of his family. Eileen knew what she looked like. Not from Hal's description, but because Springdale had seen her portrait. Just before she and her husband left England for China, they had sent it home for safe keeping . . . the magnificent portrait that Sargent had painted. Mrs. Henderson gave a talk on it, in the reading room of the college library. Red hair, coppery in the high lights, eyes that would turn an anchorite from the path of duty, skin texture that was unsurpassed in the far reach of Sargent's marvellous texture painting, a chiffon gown that reminded you of a cloud of flame-shot smoke, and a bit of still-life that was definitely, though not insistently, turquoise.

"Mrs. Henderson said that when she read a description of the picture, she supposed it was going to look like a Henner; but it was nothing of the sort. I had to go on the Q. T. to hear her talk. Of course you know, mamma belongs to the Art Study Club; but she was scandalized at Mrs. Henderson getting up there and talking about Adelaide Marksley. Lary tried to make her see that it was Sargent . . . but what's the use? You can't get that kind of an idea into my mother's head."

The Browning Club had long since gone the way of Browning. But Mrs. Henderson, after the death of her husband, was constrained to seek new means of holding her grip on the social and intellectual leadership of the town. Fortunately Mrs. Clarkson, wife of the new Dean, was not aggressive. She was glad to be enrolled,

along with Mrs. David Trench, as a member of the Art Study Club. Being a late comer in the town, she knew no reason why she should withdraw her moral support from the club, after its shocking display of the Sargent picture.

"But I hope the poor girl is at last happily married," Mrs. Ascott hastened to say. She wondered if Eileen was always quite fair to her mother.

"That's just what she isn't. And thereby hangs the tale of their coming here to live for a couple of years. Hal said his father wanted to rent Vine Cottage for them—and in that case they wouldn't have brought their furniture. But your Mr. Ramsay got ahead of him. I'm glad he did. But mamma would have turned them out, lease or no lease, if she ever got her eyes on an English paper published in Hong Kong, that Hal showed me, last night. It was the rippingest account you ever read, of Adelaide's elopement with a member of the military band. It started in a sort of musical flirtation . . . and ended in a miserable little hotel in Fu Chau. The writer said your sympathy would be with Mrs. Nims if you looked at the shape of Reginald Nims, and remembered that his wife was fond of dancing. Hal doesn't know what that means—because he never saw his brother-in-law. He must be either a cripple or fat. It won't be long till we know. They sail from Honolulu tomorrow."

"Then she's reconciled to her husband?"

"Had to be! She's trying to make the best of a bad mess. The musician soured on his bargain. . . ." The amber eyes flamed yellow. "Left her in the room at the hotel, and gave her husband the key. How did he know Nims wouldn't kill her? I should think he would—if he had any spirit. They're coming here till

the scandal blows over and they can go back to London. Adelaide loathes China, and adores England. Hal said he guessed that Nims couldn't bear to part with a wife who had red hair, even if he had to do the reversed Mormon stunt once in a while."

Mrs. Ascott experienced a swift revulsion—not at the story Eileen was telling. She had heard many such. But in the bald discussion of sex encounters there lurked a definite element of danger. For another, and less serious reason, Hal Marksley ought not to be telling this story in Springdale, where his sister expected to live. But Eileen hastened to explain that she alone was in the secret, and she . . . "was part of the family."

"Really, my dear? I hadn't suspected."

"Yes, Lady Judith, and if you'll let me, I'm coming back after school to tell you what I actually came to tell you this morning. May I? I'll have to chase home and get my books. Hal's honking for me, this minute."

III

It was three o'clock when Eileen came home from school, tossed her things on the settee in the living-room and curled herself up contentedly on a hassock at Mrs. Ascott's feet. Her cheeks were flushed and her low brow was framed in little caressing ringlets. She looked amazingly like Lary. Happiness fairly exuded from her being.

"I can't beat around the bush, Lady Judith. When I have anything to say . . . I have to go to it with both feet. Will you take care of this for me?"

She drew a shining gold chain from somewhere within the harbouring crispness of her piqué collar, wound the pliant links around her slender forefinger, and brought to light a ring set with a huge diamond. Hal had given

it to her that morning. She had known about it for some time. The stone was one of many that belonged to his father . . . and would never be missed. There was a good handful of them in a box in the office safe, and Adelaide would coax them all away from her father. He, Hal, might as well get his—while the getting was good. He had taken this one, and another for a scarf pin for himself, to St. Louis to be mounted the day after he and Eileen became engaged.

"You haven't told your mother?" Mrs. Ascott interrupted.

"I can't! I can't! If you knew mamma better. . . . It would take all the sacredness—all the meaning out of it . . . to have mamma preen herself because her daughter is going to marry the son of the richest man in town."

"And your father, Eileen?"

The fair face went gray, and pain quivered the sensitive lips. "I can't make that as clear as the other; but I'm the most unfortunate person in the world. You don't know how I have dreamt of the time when I could go to my darling old daddy and hide my blushes in his shoulder, while I told him that the greatest thing in life had come to me. And now that it's come . . . he wouldn't understand . . . or approve. And mamma, who hasn't a mortal bit of use for me, would take it as a personal triumph. Rush off to that silly little Bromfield Sentinel with an announcement of my engagement, and all about who the Marksleys are, and how much money they have. I just can't give her that gratification. I'd choke."

Sixteen! and she had life's irony at her finger ends. The amber eyes filled with tears that glistened a moment on the long lashes and went trickling down the pale

cheeks to make little welts on the stiffly starched piqué collar. Mrs. Ascott felt no impulse to smile. Here was a little hurt child, whose quivering lips might have been pleading for the life of a puppy condemned to be drowned. And it was all so deadly serious to her. Love? She might experience a dozen such heart-burnings before the dawning of the great passion.

"My dear, there is a touchstone given to each one of us, before we reach the years of discretion and judgment. Mine was my grandmother. Yours, I believe, is your father. I hid my engagement to Raoul Ascott from Grandma Holden. Only because I knew she would not approve. And, Eileen, my marriage turned out wretchedly. My husband was much older than I. And, do you know, dear, the immature mind is keenly flattered by the attention of the mature one. Hal is a college senior, almost five years older than you. If you could be sure your vanity isn't involved—"

"No, that has nothing to do with it. Hal loves me. You can't understand what that means to me . . . because . . . you don't know how my people regard me. The only thing I ever wanted is love. Not the kind that papa gives me. That's too general. He loves everything and everybody—including my mother, when she treats him like a dog. But I don't want to think about them, now. It hurts . . . to think about my father. I can stand it, because I'm not very lovable. He couldn't be unkind if he tried. He would go on loving his children, if we did the worst thing in the world. I used to wish Lary would love me . . . he's so much like papa in some ways. But you couldn't tell anybody that what you wanted was love. They'd think you were stalling—that you were after something else, and used that for a blind. Why, even Bob didn't really know me—and he

was the best friend I ever had. I used to steal matches for him, when he was learning to smoke, and I've taken many a lickin' to keep him out of trouble. I got mean and hateful after he was drowned. Talk about an all-wise Providence! I couldn't have any respect for a God that would kill Bob and leave me alive."

"But Dr. Schubert—"

"Yes, he and Syd. . . ." Her lips tightened. "They wouldn't approve of Hal either. He has a reputation for being . . . well, rather loose in his ideas. He isn't a bit worse than the other boys in college. But he happens not to be the psalm-singing kind. I hate the tight ideas I was brought up on. But that isn't what makes me love Hal. Lady Judith, if you had been told all your life that you were ugly and cross and good-for-nothing . . . and somebody came along who thought you were sweet and clever and beautiful—" She laughed shortly. "Yes, all of that! I know I'm built according to the architecture of an ironing board; but Hal says my form is perfect. He twists my hair around his fingers by the hour, and he just loves to stroke my cheeks, because my skin is soft—like Lary's, and papa's. Don't you see? Being loved like that—"

"Yes, Eileen, I see. How soon are you going to be married?"

"Not for years and years. I persuaded Hal, last night, to go to Pratt Institute, instead of that third rate college where he was going to take finance. I want him to do that—so that Lary'll respect him. He doesn't intend to settle down in this dried-up village. He hates it as much as I do." She fell silent a moment. "There's only one drawback to living away from Springdale."

"Leaving your father?"

"No, he wouldn't mind that, and neither would I—after I had a family of my own. But if one of my children should get sick—very sick—and I couldn't reach Syd—I'd be frantic! Syd's the only doctor who knows what's the matter with a baby."

"You love children, Eileen?"

"I adore them." She hugged her breast ecstatically. "I hope I'll have six. Hal loves them, too. That's only one of the tastes we have in common. He wants a home . . . he'd even be willing to let Lary build it, and select the furniture. And that's a lot . . . the way my brother treats him. I hope you'll try to see his fine side, to like him . . . for my sake. You know what it's going to mean to me."

XI Vicarious Living

I

Hal Marksley called regularly in his car to take the two girls to school. Theo, in the rôle of chaperone, was novel, to say the least. Occasionally he and Eileen went for long rides in the country when classes were over. Once they were delayed by the amusing annoyance of three punctures, and it was dinner time when they neared home. Hal took the precaution to leave the roadster on Grant Drive, traversing the three short blocks to Elm Street on foot. On other occasions, when there was no danger of encountering the men-folk of the family, Mrs. Trench would invite him in for lemonade and cake, after which she would command Eileen to play her latest violin piece—usually a bravura of technique, quite as incomprehensible to Mrs. Trench's accustomed ears as to Hal's—during which the youth would drum the window sill with impatient fingers.

It was understood between the young people that Mrs. Ascott alone was in the secret, and that the engagement ring had been placed with some of her valuables in Dr. Schubert's vault, against the time when it would be safe to display it. There was one drop of bitter in Eileen's great happiness. Her father. Even since her talk with Judith, she had been conscious of something essentially dishonourable in her conduct. She was beginning to look at her father with awakened eyes. He had always been a person of little consequence in his home. Lavinia was the dynamo that drove the plant. David was a belt or

a fly-wheel, a driving rod or some such nonessential—easily replaced if he should break or rust. But David Trench would never rust. His wife kept him going at such a rate that a high polish was his only alternative. Rust gathers on unused metal. Eileen wondered what her father was like—inside. What her mother was like, for that matter. David talked little and Lavinia talked all the time, and the revelation of silence was, if anything, more informing than that of incessant chatter.

Mrs. Ascott might win Lary over to a reluctant acceptance of the engagement; but that would have small bearing on the problem of her father. It was the way with pliant natures. You can bend them without in the least influencing their ultimate resistance. Lavinia might be shattered by a well directed blow, whereas David would yield courteous response. There might be a dent in his feelings, but his convictions, would remain as they were.

II

One Friday afternoon, as April lingered tiptoe on the threshold of May, Dr. Schubert sent for Lary to assist him with a peculiarly difficult experiment, one calling for strong nerves and a quick perception. When it was finished, Lary and Judith walked home together, crossing the campus to avoid the thoroughfare that connected the old residence quarter with the fashionable section that had rooted itself in the once fertile farms of Springdale's newer society.

"Would you mind going a little out of your way?" the man asked, consulting his watch. "It's early, and I have a troublesome problem. You know women—I don't."

"An estimate of a possible Mrs. Trench? Take my

advice, Lary. Have her sized up for you by a man—never by another woman. Women can't be just to each other when they meet on . . . mating ground. Besides, no woman ever tells a man quite what she thinks of another woman. The other woman's secret is, in part, her own. She must guard it—as you guarded the silly secrets of your college fraternity. If you ever saw the inside of one of us, you'd know how little there is to conceal. But the mystery . . . that's the important thing. Still, I'll do my best. I'm old enough to be your mother, and ought to trust my judgment."

"There is no potential Mrs. Trench in this problem. The thing that's worrying me is the inglenook in a house I'm building in Roosevelt Place. The woman—who has exceptionally definite ideas of architecture—has changed her mind three times. Now she's as dissatisfied with her own planning as she is with mine. We're at our wits' end, and I must find—"

"Look, Lary, those birds! They're fighting!"

The woman seized his arm and whirled him about. They were nearing the end of the campus walk, where the maples cast slow-dancing shadows on the hard gravel. Larimore Trench almost lost his footing, as the pebbles scurried across the grass. He looked at his companion in astonishment. She was not one to go off her head at trifles, yet her tone revealed genuine alarm. In the grass, not ten feet away, two chesty robins were battling like miniature game cocks, their cries denoting a grotesque kind of rage.

"La femme in the case is over there on that syringa," Lary told her, "estimating the prospects for the posterity she expects to mother. I have never been satisfied with the age I have to live in. But I'm glad I wasn't born a troglodyte, in a world crying for population."

As he spoke, his back to the street, Hal and Eileen whisked by in their car and disappeared around the corner. The two watched the birds a moment. Then they resumed their walk. The easy confidence that had grown, quite unnoticed, between them was interrupted. Strive as they would they could find no common ground. Judith was vexed with Eileen. Why should she come along, with her crashing discord, at just that moment? And again, why did it matter whether she and Larimore Trench had a pleasant walk or a sullen one? They had long since discussed every problem under the sun—and had found all of them hopelessly old. As they turned from Grant Drive and were entering Roosevelt Place, she paused to lay an arresting hand on his arm.

"Lary, there are three houses here under construction. The one near the middle of the block is yours. You haven't even a bowing acquaintance with the other two."

The man—not the architect—flushed with pleasure. He had never talked shop to Mrs. Ascott, and her recognition of one of his ideas, simply rendered in rough concrete and blue-green tile, pleased him. She would help him to compromise with Mrs. Morton about that inglenook. But the inglenook was only a subterfuge. He wanted to talk to her about his sister. She alone could make Eileen see that her admirer was uncouth, a good-looking animal devoid of a single quality to survive the honeymoon.

III

As they picked their way cautiously between paint cans and piles of building refuse, Lary discovered that the workmen had erected a barricade between the front hall and the livingroom, and the angle of the stairway shut the chimney corner from view. On the second floor

there was another obstacle. The floors had been newly waxed, and a stern "Verboten" flaunted its impotent arrogance in their path. They continued their climb to the third floor, where children, servants, billiards, and winter garments would be harboured. Judith paused in the door to the nursery, crossed the room and sank, exhausted, in the wide window seat. Lary found place beside her, as he told her of the clever girl who had done the Peter Pan frieze above the yellow painted wall.

"Are you fond of children, Lary?" She was thinking of Eileen.

"No, I detest them."

"You— But how can you say such a thing? Your understanding with Theodora is perfect. You kindle, you glow, when you are telling her stories from the classics."

"That's because she isn't a child. I believe she never was. But my affection for her didn't begin when she was. . . . The first few months, I believe I hated her. I may tell you about it some time. When I lose patience with my mother—and other women—I think about that hideous afternoon, twelve years ago last December. I don't believe any child—or anything else that men and women are at such a bother to create and leave behind them—is worth all that suffering."

Mrs. Ascott withdrew, ever so little. She did not like Larimore Trench when his tone revealed that peculiar timbre, that quality of boyish cynicism. He had seen so much of books, so little of life. And then it came to her that he viewed everything in the sordid world—the world outside his imagination—through the distorting lenses of his mother's personality, her limitations and her prejudices. In his most violent opposition he was, nevertheless, directed by her. He would go to the

south pole . . . because she stood obstinately at the north. It was she who shaped his course, determined his stand. Her insistence on the fundamental importance of material progress drove him early to the post of disinterested onlooker. That he did his work, and did it well, was a reflex of his inner nature, the nature that came to him when David's fineness and Lavinia's dynamic ardour were fused, in a moment of unthinking contact. And it was the penalty of such fusing, that neither of his parents comprehended the nature they had given him.

IV

The silence towered, opaque and forbidding, between them. But they had come with a purpose, groping their way to the same objective, neither one guessing what was in the other's mind. By a devious path, that was nevertheless essentially feminine, Judith approached:

"Lary, do you want to tell me about your brother? It would have made such a difference in Eileen's life—if he had lived."

"You would have enjoyed Bob—a tremendous fellow, every phase of him. He played half-back on the college team when he was sixteen. And at that, he took the state cup in the half mile dash. He had medals for hammer throwing and pole vault. There is a whole case of his cups and ribbons in the college library. He's the only one of us who inherited my mother's energy. Oh, Sylvia, of course. She can rattle around and make a great showing—and she does actually accomplish things when she has a definite purpose . . . something she wants to do. The rest of us are a listless pack. We'd rather climb a tree and watch the parade go by. But Bob was in everything, for the sheer fun of living. It

looks to me like a stupid blunder . . . to cut off such virility before it had perpetuated itself."

"Eileen told me she had lost her respect for God, since her brother was drowned. She was so naïve and in such deadly earnest."

"Eileen was a born doubter. I was sixteen when I revolted against the idea of a Deity with the duties of an ordinary stockroom clerk—and it was one of Eileen's searching questions that set me thinking. Not bad for six years old. Mamma holds to the old orthodox belief as one of the hallmarks of respectability. In her day, and town, the iconoclasts were pool-room keepers and saloon bums. The catechism was drilled into us as soon as we could talk. My mother would have been a great ritualist, if she had had the luck to be born an Anglican. There isn't much in her church to hang your hat on."

"But your father, Lary—religion means something to him."

"Yes . . . it's about all he has. Eileen breaks his heart with her irreverent flings. I spare him. Not because I am more considerate than she. More selfish, perhaps. I can't take the consequences of inflicting pain. You'll call it crass spiritual weakness—a flaw in the casting. I've tried to overcome it. I couldn't have endured. . . ."

His voice wavered, "Last night I heard my father praying for Eileen. It was ghastly. I wanted to tell her how she is torturing him. But it would only provoke a fresh outburst of scoffing."

"Lary, will you give Eileen into my hands—stop worrying about her—you and your father? Will you persuade him that I have been sent 'from on high' to guide her through this wilderness? I may fail; but I have her confidence."

"Papa was afraid, because you were rich, that you

would share her mother's view. Oh, not that Eileen took refuge in your sympathy. She's too proud, too good a sport, for that. She only told him that money, *per se*, was no obstacle—*vide* Mrs. Ascott. Before she was through with it, she told him that if he kept on, she would go to the devil with Hal Marksley. It was after that that he carried his trouble to the God who is said to answer prayers."

"As a substitute for the Deity. . . . But at least, Lary, I know the premises. And at the worst, it is only the working out of her own nature. No one can live Eileen's life for her, not even her father. But there's the tower clock, striking six. You will be late for dinner—and we haven't looked at that inglenook."

XII The Poem Judith Read

I

From her vine-screened retreat in the summer house, Judith Ascott looked out on the fairest May Day she had ever known. It was the morning after . . . and the promise she had made to Lary hung sinister and foreboding over her spirit. Everything around her was vibrant with coming summer. At home the buds would be opening timorously, while here the perennial climbers were in full leaf. An aureate splendour, seductive as Danae's rain, rippled through the open structure of the pergola, transmuting the pebble walk to a pavement of costly gems; but within the widening of the arbour—that David had converted into an outdoor living-room—the frightened shadows sought refuge from the shafts that would presently destroy them. To the cool umbrageous corner nearest the house, where the light was faint, the woman had taken her world-weary body, yearning for the relaxation her bed had denied her.

It was all so insistent, this new life that had come to her, its music keyed to a pitch she had never realized, a tempo beyond the reach of her experience. The Trenches. Were there other families in the universe like this one? Before her coming to Springdale she had viewed the world through a thick forest of people, most of them intolerably tiresome. In the main they were contented . . . such contentment as is to be derived from a favourable turn in the market or the balm of Bermuda to beguile a winter's day. Happy lives, she

had read, make uninteresting biographies. Her life had been far from happy, and her biography would be utterly stupid. Mrs. Trench was—she realized with a stab of astonishment—a desperately unhappy woman, and her life story was made up of a propitious marriage and six abnormally interesting children. And then . . . Theo appeared at the other side of the garden wall, discerned the white-clad figure among the verdant shadows of the summer house, and scaled the low barrier with the nimbleness of a squirrel. In the folds of her skirt she held something, and a furtive air pervaded her small person.

II

"Dear Lady Judith, may I have the honour of a morning call?"

"Do come, you little ray of sunshine. Your Lady Judith's sky is overcast, and she is in sore need of cheer."

"Don't you go bothering Mrs. Ascott this morning," Theo's mother cried sharply from the pantry window. "You ought to know enough not to wear out your welcome."

"No danger," Judith assured her. She did not perceive the look of sharp displeasure on the older woman's face, but the voice affected her disagreeably, and she turned for relief to the anomalous reproduction of Lavinia, who was already nestling confidently at her side, on the oaken settle. The child spread upon her knee two sheets of paper, on which many lines had been written. A casual glance betrayed the agony of composition. Words had been discarded by the device of an impatient pen stroke. Others had been consigned to oblivion by means of carefully drawn lines. Phrases had been transposed and rhyming terminals changed.

"It's a poem. I thought it would help to cheer you

up. Mamma wouldn't like it, and neither would Mrs. Stevens—because it doesn't hop along on nice little iambic feet. It has to say 'te-tum, te-tum, te-tum,' or they think it isn't poetry. Eileen writes some that are wilder than this one; but she never lets mamma see them. She wrote one on Love, last Sunday morning, when she ought to have been listening to the sermon, and . . . what do you think! Left it in the hymn book! And Kitten Henderson found it, and sent it to Dan Vincel as her own composition."

Mrs. Ascott took the copy, scanning the first page with crescent interest. She had not thought of Eileen as a poet. Yet such intense musical feeling. . . . The musician is seldom a poet of marked quality or distinction. The godlike gifts of rhythm, cadence, imagery, these may not flow with equal volume in double channels. Yet the verses, however crude, would shed another light on a nature too complex for ready analysis. There was no title, no clue to the impulse that promoted the writing. There was no need of such. A girl in Eileen's rhapsodic mental state would not go far in search of inspiration.

"Birth, Hope, Ambition, Love,
These four the minor half of life compose:
The sylvan stream to broadening river flows,
And, golden-fair, replete with promise, glows
The radiant Sun above.

"The major half of life?
Love scars the soul, as 'twere a searing brand:
Ambition turns to ashes in our hand,
Nor, 'til the glass has spilled its latest sand,
Comes rest from urge and strife.

"O Birth! thou wanton wight
That dost with smiles enmask thy mocking eyes!

The Poem Judith Read

87

How dost thou cheat the unborn soul that flies
Full-eager from its formless Paradise
To realms of Death and Night!"

Theo sat breathless, a flush of expectation staining her dark skin, as the first page was laid aside and the second came to view. Before the remaining stanzas were finished, her heart was beating visibly through the thin morning dress, as her lips fashioned soundlessly the lines she had memorized at the second reading:

"O Love! more wanton e'en
Than Birth or Hope or bold Ambition, thine
To lift the quivering soul to heights divine,
To mad the brain with Amor's poisoned wine,
To spread thy wonder-sheen

"O'er eyes that erst could see!
Thy promises, how fair, how full of bliss!
Are mortals born for rapture such as this?
Helas! the web was cunning-wove, I wis,
That e'en entangled me!"

"Theodora, are you *sure* that Eileen wrote these verses?"

"Eileen? Goodness, no! She scrawls all over the paper. You never saw her write a neat little hand like that."

"Then who did write it?"

"Why . . . Lary, of course. I thought you knew he was the poet—the *real* poet of the family. He wrote it last night. I saw his light burning at four o'clock this morning. I couldn't sleep, either. Mine was ear-ache. His was another kind. He says you always have to agonize when you write anything worth while. And I think this poem is . . . worth while . . . don't you?"

The solid ground of assurance was, somehow, slip-

ping from beneath her feet. Lady Judith was not pleased. Her usually pale cheeks burned red, and there was an unfamiliar look in her eyes.

"Eileen told you to bring this to me?"

"Humph! You don't think I'd show her Lary's poem? He lets me see lots of things he writes, that mamma and the rest of them don't know anything about—till they're published. And if the stupid editors send them back—I never do tell. I wouldn't . . . for the world."

"He gave you this to read?"

"N-n-not exactly. He left the desk unlocked. Didn't put the top quite all the way down, and one corner of the paper was sticking out. I had to see what it was, so that if it was something the others oughtn't to see, I could put it under the blotter, out of sight."

An expression of Dutton's flashed through Mrs. Ascott's mind: "Theo's the spit of her mother. She'll do the dirtiest tricks, and explain 'em on high moral grounds." She caught and held the dark, troubled eyes.

"Theodora, do you know that you have done something almost unpardonable?"

"But, Lady Judith, when anybody feels the way Lary does, and you love him as much as I do—don't you see, the sooner there's an understanding, the better? It was that way with the Lady Judith in the story. And if it hadn't been for the meddlesome fairy, that found the drawing of the two hearts, interlocked, the Prince wouldn't have known, till it was too late."

"Theo," the woman interrupted sharply, "take these two sheets of paper back to your brother's room, and lay them exactly as you found them, so that he won't know they have been moved or seen."

Fear puckered the thin little face, fear and chagrin.

With sparrow-like motion she turned and darted in the direction of the wicket gate. Midway she stopped, arrested by the timbre of Mrs. Ascott's voice—a sternness she had not deemed possible.

"Come back, Theodora, if you want me ever to care for you again."

A moment the lithe body wavered, the mind irresolute, Then she set her head impishly on one side, looked at the angry, frightened woman with a scold-me-if-you-can expression, and slowly retraced her steps, dragging her toes in the gravel and swaying her straight hips from side to side. It was pure bravado. At the entrance to the summer house, her spirit broke. In another instant she was in Mrs. Ascott's lap and great sobs were shaking her agitated bosom.

"There, precious, I didn't mean to hurt you. But, can't you realize, dearie? You must be made to realize, no matter how it hurts."

"No, you are the one who must be made to realize. I knew it, all along."

"Knew what, Theo?"

"That Lary's crazy about you. He never cared for anybody—not even puppy-dog love, when he was a boy. He was glad when Sylvia married, so he wouldn't have to take her girl friends home—when they hung around so late that they were afraid to go home by themselves. I've been waiting to tell you about him for ever so long. You couldn't know how good he is—how good—and wonderful." The smothered voice was full of adoration. "He has the dearest ways, when you are all alone with him. And he never misses the point of a joke. Mamma can say witty things; but she almost never sees the other fellow's joke. And his hands are so gentle—not strong and rough, like Bob's. If you only knew. . . .

But Lary wouldn't ever tell you the nice side of him."

Hungry arms pressed her close.

"Ah!" the advocate stopped her pleading, to sigh with infinite relief. "You won't be angry with me. But, Lady Judith, I had to do it . . . if you hadn't ever forgiven me. Lary is teaching me to stand things like a stoic. And when so much depends on it—" The eyes flamed with an idea. "You know, like walking along in the dark, and all at once somebody strikes a match to light a cigar, and you see that there is a hole in the road that you would have fallen into. If no one had struck a match, how would you know the hole was there?"

"And you can keep this secret—never let your brother suspect?"

"He's the last person in the world that I'd tell. He'd be more angry than you were. And there's another reason. I'm not quite sure that Lary knows what's the matter with him. Of course he says—in the last stanza of the poem. He's written love poetry before, when it was only a woman he imagined, and so he might not think it was serious. Mrs. Ferguson said that if her husband had suspected that he was falling in love with her, he would have taken the first train out of town. Afterward . . . he was glad he didn't know."

"Theodora! Are you sixty years old, and have you settled the marriage problems of a dozen unpromising daughters and granddaughters? Where did you get such ideas?"

"I heard mamma and Mrs. Ferguson talking about it, before Sylvia was married. I never forget anything I hear; but it's an awful long time before I get light on some things. When I read Lary's poem, this morning—and came to that last line—and remembered how pale you looked when you came out in the yard before break-

fast—why, all at once the ideas came tumbling together, and I knew that Lary mustn't know he was in love till he was so far in, he wouldn't want to ever get out."

It was adorable, the way she took Mrs. Ascott's attitude and response for granted. No woman, not even the enshrined Lady Judith, would fail to be honoured by Lary's love.

III

"*Theo-do-ra!*" Drusilla's broad cadence issued from the pantry window. Drusilla was the coffee-coloured maid of all work, who was serving temporarily as mouth-piece for Mrs. Trench. "Come home this minute, honey. You got to do an errand befoh lunch."

Theodora reflected that there was time for twenty such errands. And her perplexity grew when, after a few minutes, she saw Eileen pass through the wicket gate to take Mrs. Ascott an embroidery pattern from an old number of the *Self Culture* magazine. She remembered distinctly that Mrs. Ascott had said she did not care particularly about it. That was a week ago. Why had mamma dragged it out now, and sent it over by Eileen?

With all her wizard penetration, the child had never glimpsed the deep windings of her mother's mind. Mrs. Ascott could not be counted on to take a lively interest in two of the Trench children, and for the present Eileen was the focal point of her mother's concern. More and more the conviction grew that this woman from the great outside world had been sent by Divine Providence to aid in bringing to swift climax what otherwise might have been a long drawn out affair.

Long engagements were dangerous. Sylvia had been engaged to Tom Henderson for two years. If she, Lavinia Larimore, had listened to Calvin, when he begged

her to run away and be married, the night he proposed to her. . . . It was when she reached this stage in her silent soliloquy that she determined to have Drusilla call Theodora home, and send Eileen to Vine Cottage in her stead.

XIII Eyes Turned Homeward

I

It is improbable that Bromfield's weekly paper would have yielded its meagre space for the chronicling of Eileen Trench's engagement, had that important fact been divulged at home. There were other, more momentous things going on. The entire front page of each issue was plastered with the Stone sensation, which grew by melodramatic leaps to something like an international affair. Fournier Stone had been captured in Montreal, had broken from his captor and leaped into the river. At first it was thought that he had been drowned; but he was an agile swimmer, and it was reported that a man answering his description had been seen near Longueuil, an hour or two after his escape.

From Mrs. Stone's darkened bedroom came bulletins of one collapse after another. The news that her darling had perished in the treacherous waters beneath the Victoria bridge affected her so profoundly that the physician resorted to nitroglycerine injections to restore her. Lavinia read the accounts with emotions that surged from exultation to a species of envy. The part she had been called upon to play was such a drab one, that Lettie Stone's colourful rôle stung her. To ease her mind, she fell back on one passage of Scripture after another. She might have known all along that the marriage would end in something like this. It was right that it should end this way . . . right that an immoral, unprincipled woman should suffer. And Calvin? No doubt he was

suffering, too. But what was the good of going over that ground—ground that she had long since stripped bare of every sprig of comfort or misery?

At last came the startling denouement. Mrs. Calvin Stone was dead. There had been a simple private funeral—attended by everybody in Bromfield. That night Fournier had slipped stealthily into town, and out to the cemetery, where he had ended his life on his mother's grave. The account of the double tragedy was not news to Lavinia. Ellen Larimore had sent a telegram . . . just why, it was difficult to explain. The message came Sunday morning, while David and the girls were at church and Lary was at the office getting out some rush specifications. It conveyed only the bare information that Fournier Stone had shot himself, the night after his mother's funeral.

"Dead . . . Calvin free!" the woman muttered, staring in a daze at the words. And, after a moment of strangling emotion: "But what difference does it make—now? I can't be there to see it. I wouldn't go, *if I could.*"

At this juncture Lavinia's thoughts took an unexpected turn. She was always thinking things she had no intention of harbouring within her consciousness—as if she had a whole cellar full of ideas she did not know she possessed. The one that came up to her now nauseated her. To see Calvin weeping over the body of his dead wife! Oh, the insolent superiority of the dead! You have no words with which to confront them. All their failings, all their sins are lifted above your most virtuous attack. It would be like this if David should die, and she could no longer upbraid him. No, it was better for people to go on living. You could at least speak your mind, without galling self-reproach.

II

Lavinia was determined to put Calvin Stone definitely and permanently from her thought. He had been amply punished for his monstrous treatment of her. The incident was closed, and at last she could have peace. And then something came to divert all her thinking into a channel that must have been present in the dark valley of her being all the while—unrecognized, because the need for it had been so hazily remote. A story—one of Larimore's foolish stories. She seldom listened to them; but this one she could not escape. Eileen had gone home with Hal Marksley and had met his sister. It was Wednesday, and the outcome of the Stone imbroglio was still locked in her heart, the telegram having been burned in the kitchen range, Sunday morning, while Drusilla was on the second floor, doing up the bedrooms.

After dinner the Trench family had gravitated, one by one, to Mrs. Ascott's summer house. David was there, laughing boyishly at something Eileen was telling. What were they talking about? Lavinia's sharp ears caught a sentence now and then. It was not her wont to be out of things, the things that concerned her family. Her tenant seldom invited her—specifically. But then she never invited Mrs. Ascott, either. Going to the pantry, she filled a plate with raisin muffins, from the afternoon's baking. Eileen would approach that shrine, armed with a sensational story; but her mother carried breakfast rolls.

III

When Nanny had taken the plate into the house, Judith made room for Mrs. Trench on the settle at her side. David leaned against the solid beam that he had set, seven years ago, to support the arch of the doorway.

His blue eyes were full of unwonted content. Theodora was perched on the afternoon tea table, folded now to look like a packing case, steadying herself by a brown hand on her father's arm. Eileen was on the other bench with Lary. She resumed the narrative that had been interrupted by her mother's arrival:

"Yes, he's the most unspeakable beast I ever saw. Oh, by-the-way, mamma, I was telling them about meeting Mr. and Mrs. Nims, this afternoon. Kitten and Hal and I had to go over to the house to get some rugs and things for the play, in the college chapel, and Adelaide opened the door for us."

"You don't mean— How did she treat you?"

"Oh, all right. She didn't know me from anybody else. . . . But she's coming to help coach us, the night of dress rehearsal. Mrs. Henderson said, in her talk, that most of the charm in that Sargent portrait was the technique—brush work and colour arrangement. But Adelaide Nims doesn't need Johnny Sargent or any other artist to tell her how to colour up. She had on an embroidered Chinese robe—the kind the Mandarin women wear in the house—pinkish tan, with a wide band of blue around the sleeves and neck—the kind of blue that fairly made her hair flame. I wanted to eat her, she was so beautiful. And just then I got a glimpse of her husband, through the window. He was sprawled all over a lawn bench that was built to hold three decent-sized people, and his stomach came out like the side of the rain barrel. I was trying to get a good look at his face, when he began to yawn—you know, the kind of a yawn that ate up all the rest of his features. I wanted to giggle . . . or scream! And when he finally came into the house, and Kitten and I met him, I couldn't think of a thing but that awful cavern inside his mouth. Gee! I'd hate to have

to live with a man who looks like a hogshead, split down the middle, and an Edam cheese for a head—and no neck at all.”

“I didn’t suppose the nobility looked like that,” Mrs. Trench snapped.

“Humph! He’s only a younger son—and nine brothers and nephews between him and a handle to his name. Adelaide must have been in an awful tight pinch to have married him, money or no money.”

“He may not have been so stout when he courted her,” David ventured. “When your mother married me, no one would have thought of calling me her ‘better three-quarters’—and look at us now.”

“*Other* three-quarters,” Lavinia corrected. “I never could see the justice in calling a man his wife’s ‘better’ half.”

“There’s historical warrant for your objection, mamma,” Lary said, hoping to avert the revelation his mother was all too prone to make—her callous contempt for David in particular and men as a class.

“You don’t mean the tiresome old story of Adam and the rib,” Eileen demurred.

“Nothing like that. I found the story in some elective Greek we were reading, my third year in college. And as you describe this Mr. Nims, he seems to fit the original model. Seven of us were selected to translate the Symposium of Plato, and I had the story Aristophanes was said to have told at that memorable banquet. It was in response to the toast, ‘The Origin of Love.’ As the gods planned the world, there was no such thing as love. But they had created a race of terribly efficient mortals—hermaphroditic beings, man and woman in one body, their faces looking in opposite directions. They had four legs and a double pair of arms, and when they

wanted to go somewhere in a hurry, they rolled over and over, like an exaggerated cart wheel, touching all their hands and feet to the ground in succession. They could see what was going on behind them, and could throw missiles in two directions at the same time.

"As long as they didn't realize their advantage, it was all right. But one day a leader was born among them. I suspect it was the female half of him who discovered that they were superior to the gods. If they went about it right, they could capture Olympus, and send the gods to earth to toil and offer sacrifices. The one thing the gods cared about was having their vanity fed, by the smoke from countless altars. It was for this service that man was created, in the beginning. So, when it was reported on Mount Olympus that mortals aspired to be gods, Zeus conceived a way to avert the disaster, and at the same time have twice as many creatures on earth to offer sacrifices.

"He made a great feast, and invited all the insolent race of man. And when he had them at his mercy, so that they couldn't escape, he had them brought to him, one at a time, and cleft them in two, vertically, so that they could look only in one direction, and run on only two feet—"

"O-wee-woo!" Theodora squirmed. "Didn't they bleed . . . terribly?"

"Hush, Theo, it's only a story," Mrs. Trench exclaimed, irritably.

"And that's how a man and his other half came to be separated," David said, drawing Theodora to him and stroking her pain-puckered brow.

"Yes, the gods thought they had destroyed man, when they cleft him in two," Lary went on, his brown eyes shining. "But in that act of ruthlessness they sowed the

seeds of their own destruction. When they hurled the mutilated creatures out of Paradise, most of the halves became separated. Then began the endless search for their other halves. The men realized that they couldn't live up to their full capacity, with the feminine side of themselves gone. And when they did find each other, they experienced a rapture that surpassed the highest emotional possibility of the immortals. That thrill was love. The gods heard about it, and condescended to mate with mortals, in the hope of experiencing the thrill. But it was useless. They had not been separated from their other halves."

"But how did they sow the seeds of their own destruction?" Judith asked.

"It's the old story of the apple in the Garden of Eden. The thing they couldn't get became the ultimate desideratum. They devoted all their energy to the quest of love. They deserted all their old godlike pursuits—and in the end, the Greek deities crumbled and were destroyed by the more vigorous gods of the barbarians."

Theodora pondered the tale. She could not be satisfied by the application to Mr. and Mrs. Nims. The tublike man, who was far more tublike in her imagination than Eileen's exaggerated description should have warranted, was undoubtedly the man who was married to Hal's sister. But Mrs. Nims was thin. And he was her second husband. Manifestly something was wrong.

"But Lary, suppose when those men tried to find their other halves, they couldn't. . . . Their right halves had died, or had got tired of waiting and had gone off with some one else. . . ."

"There wouldn't be any thrill of love, and the man couldn't do his best, because he lacked the right person to urge him on," David told her.

"Humph!" this from Eileen, "I guess the woman would be in as bad a fix as the man. Poor Adelaide Nims has had two tries at her other half, and missed it both times. She's terribly unhappy, for all that she puts up such a good front. Lady Judith, don't you think she ought to keep on trying till she does find the right one? Or is there a right one for all of us?"

"Yes . . . unless we rush off into an alliance that prevents us from recognizing our true mate," Mrs. Ascott said pointedly.

The girl flushed. The shaft had gone home. She shifted her gaze from the clear gray eyes . . . and surprised an inexplicable expression on her mother's face.

IV

Lavinia had listened, without interest, to the story. But the application—she had been brought up on stories with a Moral at the end. "Unless we rush off into an alliance. . . ." Her face grew hard, a yellow pallor spreading from neck to brow. That was what she had done. That was what Calvin had done. It was his fault, not hers; that she had erred. She ignored the years of waiting, before Calvin had known Lettie. And those two had been mismated, had lived apart most of the time, the first few years of their married life, had quarreled violently when they were together. There must have been a right partner for Calvin. She choked with emotion as she realized—she had never been sure of it, in all those years—that Lettie was not the right one. She would like to see Calvin Stone again, now that it was all over. But what was the use? There was David, forty-eight, and ridiculously healthy. That night she lay awake, into the gray of dawn, thinking, thinking. . . .

XIV A Broken Axle

I

Late Thursday afternoon Mrs. Trench crossed the lawn with tottering steps. She looked incredibly old, with the bloodless lips and the greenish pallor of her sunken cheeks. "No wonder her children are temperamental," Judith thought, remembering the crispness of her step and the full flush of her dark skin as she crossed that same stretch of grass the previous evening, the plate of rolls in her hand. She came now with no offering of good will. There was set purpose in her eyes. And her mouth . . . Judith wondered how she could have thought Eileen's mouth looked like that. A sleepless night and the bald revelation of Calvin Stone's sorrow—discussed at the luncheon table as the Bromfield paper was handed about—had reduced her resistive power to its lowest point. When her life stream was full, she had little difficulty concealing the slimy bed of her being. But now, with all her animation ebbed away, she groped within her own turbid depths, blinded by resentment and self-pity until even prudence forsook her. In any other state of mind, she would not have flung down the gauntlet to the one woman on whom she must depend for the furthering of her plans.

"Mrs. Ascott, would you mind going inside? I can't stand this sunshine. I never could see why David put a door in the west side of this summer house, where the

afternoon sun can shine right in your face. But David always bungles things."

"You are ill. I am so sorry."

"It's nothing. I'll be myself after I've had a night's rest. The fact is, I want to have a plain talk with you." Judith led the way to the library. With rigid lips, that marred her usual sharp enunciation, she began bluntly. "I feel that it's my Christian duty to tell you some nasty truths about that Mrs. Nims."

"Village gossip. I'm sure, Mrs. Trench, I'm not in the least interested."

An ugly purplish red crept along Lavinia's corded neck and up over the cheeks to the line of straight black hair.

"But you and Eileen are planning all sorts of intimacy—musical trio with you at the piano, playing accompaniments for the violin and 'cello—and Larimore and his father are terribly vexed. Of course you couldn't be expected to know anything about the woman . . . being a newcomer in the town. And you couldn't know how important it is to me, right now, not to have my husband displeased."

It transpired that Eileen had talked too much, at breakfast, that morning . . . too many details of her call at the Marksleys' home, the play the Dramatic Club was putting on, for the benefit of the laboratory fund, in which Hal Marksley had to kiss her, beneath the pale glow of a marvellously devised stage moon.

"The trio was only a tentative suggestion. If Mr. Trench—"

"It isn't so much his opposition as Larimore's. He never had any use for the Marksley family—and this big competition coming on. Villa residence, keeper's lodge, garage and barns. It will mean a great deal to my son

to win that commission. And the contract for the construction will be the biggest thing Mr. Trench has had since he put up the new Science Hall.

"I should think being kind to Mrs. Nims would be a help rather than a hindrance," Mrs. Ascott said, perplexed.

"It would, if I had reasonable men to deal with. The fact is—if I *must* speak plainly—young Mr. Marksley is very much in love with Eileen. I wouldn't have anything come between them for the world. You are a married woman. You ought to know Eileen's type. She isn't the least bit like me. If she resembles any of my family, it is my sister Isabel—and we were thankful to get her safely married at seventeen."

"But Mr. Marksley, they told me, is going to Pratt when he is graduated from the college, here. It will be four or five years before—"

"Some more of Eileen's foolishness. What use has he for more education—with all that money? And she knows as well as I do that he can go into business with his brother Alfred, in St. Louis, the day after commencement. He doesn't have to depend on his father, who detests him. I suppose Eileen has told you that fact, too."

Mrs. Ascott shook her head, irritation mounting to anger, as her caller's tone divested itself of that modicum of reserve that had been the inculcated habit of years. In all her experience she had never met a woman like Lavinia Trench. From their second meeting, there had been an undercurrent of hostility, which Lavinia was at great pains to subdue or conceal. A rich woman was a person to be envied . . . and conciliated. In her normal state she would not have jeopardized the fragile bond of surface friendship that bound them.

Not that the interview reached the disgusting level of a quarrel. Yet Judith was betrayed into the fatal error of attempting to reason with a woman whose mental processes had never recognized the inevitable link between cause and effect. She did not know how to deal with the mind that leaped from one vantage point to another, with all the nimbleness and none of the objectivity of a circus acrobat. Dutton had once said of Mrs. Trench: "You can't nail that woman down. When you trap her square, on her own proposition—she's over yonder, on an entirely different subject, crowing over you. If she can't make her point, she talks about something else." But Judith gave little heed to Dutton's mumblings.

The one thing Mrs. Trench had made unequivocally plain was that Larimore and his father must not be antagonized. This could be accomplished only by keeping Eileen's fondness for Hal in the background, and avoiding any public contact with his highly immoral sister. It was in connection with Mrs. Nims that Judith blundered. She could not believe that either David or Larimore Trench would cast a stone at the woman who had sinned and was unhappy because of her sin.

"You mean Mary Magdalene, and all that? Well, I don't believe Christ expects *me* to associate with the woman who ran away from two husbands—travelled with the first one for three weeks before they were married at all. There's no reforming a woman like Adelaide Marksley. She's bad, through and through."

"There may have been extenuating circumstances. What do you and I know about her inside life? Until we have been tempted, as she was, we have no moral right to set up our code—"

"You think I have never been tempted? I could tell you a story . . . if I was a-mind to. It was only my sense of honour and duty. And that ought to be enough for Adelaide Nims or any other woman."

"She may not have had a very clear conception of the meaning of 'honour' and 'duty.' Do you think those terms mean the same thing to all women? Do they mean the same thing to any woman, at all times? You don't know anything about the inner life of the girl who grows up in a loveless home, or is trapped in a childless home of her own, with a man who doesn't love her. Your life has been crowded with responsibility and affection. You have a husband whose devotion to you is the most beautiful—"

"You think David is a paragon. You haven't had to live with him for almost twenty-eight years. You haven't had to drive him, every step he took, for fear he would sit down on you, and let the family starve. And as for the children . . . what has that got to do with it? Why—it was when Isabel was so sick that—that the minister kept calling and calling. All the women in the church were crazy about him. I never dreamt he was in love with me till the night before the baby died. But I showed him his place, quick enough, when he told me he could see that David didn't understand or appreciate me." Her eyes gleamed with pride, as if she would have gloated: "There! You didn't know I had been tempted—and by the minister, too!"

"For all that, Mrs. Trench, you can't draw the line between the woman who sins and the one who is saved from sinning by some fortuitous accident. Your baby died, the next day. If she had lived . . . and you had seized the chance for the happiness you had missed, I would have no condemnation for you. I know. I was

almost in sight of that treacherous snare—when the axle of our motor car broke, and my father overtook us and—brought me to my senses. We were within a mile of the pier where his yacht was anchored—the man who was as unhappy in his loveless home as I was in mine. We were going to Italy, to hunt for what we both had missed. My husband had gone to Egypt with another woman. I told myself that my marriage vow was an empty mockery. . . .” She stopped, a sickening wave of self-disgust overwhelming her. Why had she bared her soul to this woman?

Lavinia? She made no effort to conceal her horror. So this was why Mrs. Ascott did not wear mourning!

“And he, your husband—divorced you?”

“No, I divorced him. In New York there is only one cause for divorce, and in the eyes of the law, I had committed no offence. Mrs. Nims, with her bringing up—with the family environment that surrounds her and her brother—”

“Oh, with men it is different. You don’t expect morality in them. David says that Hal is fast. That’s at the bottom of the whole trouble. I wish I hadn’t said anything about the affair. I might have known you wouldn’t see it as I do. But then, I hadn’t suspected—” She checked herself. There were some things Lavinia wouldn’t say, even when she was indignant to the core.

III

When she went home, a few minutes later, she resolved to padlock the wicket gate—to secure it with hammer and nails, if need be. She would not have her family subjected to such an influence. Eileen was completely bewitched. It was “Mrs. Ascott this” and “Lady Judith that” from morning till night. Theo was even worse.

David was getting to look like a boy, since he had been chatting across the wall with that designing woman. And Larimore! He was already in her clutches. How could a mother have been so blind? If the gate were closed, with obvious intent, Mrs. Ascott would take the hint, and move away.

Then she remembered the months that Vine Cottage had stood idle. It was a poor time to rent a furnished cottage, with vacation coming on, and ever so many of the faculty houses eager to be leased for the summer months. Besides . . . Mrs. Ascott had her redeeming points. She was never at a loss which forks to put on the table, and how to add that chic effect to a costume. If Eileen were to shine as Mrs. Henry Marksley, Junior, she would need much coaching. And, after all, what had Mrs. Ascott done? She might have gone to Italy in a yacht. A flight in a motor car—pursuit—a broken axle—capture! There had never been anything like that in Lavinia Trench's life. Then, too, her husband had deserted her . . . had run away with another woman. It was always, in these cases, "running." One could not conceive of a leisurely departure from the confines of the moral code. No doubt Mr. Ascott had abused her. Men usually did, when they were casting amorous eyes at some one else. That made a different case of it. Her father had taken her back. It could not have resulted in a public scandal. Probably the facts never leaked out. Mrs. Ascott had certainly been received by the best society in New York and Pelham before coming to Springdale.

Moreover . . . this thing of nailing up gates did not always turn out the way one expected. She had nailed up one gate in her life that she would have given the whole world to open. And this was such a friendly

little gate. Who could tell but that some day she, Vine—the self-sufficient—might need a friend? Mrs. Ascott was—potent phrase—“a woman of the world.” She made the women of Springdale look pitifully gauche. It was not a bad idea to have such a woman as a neighbour. Not too much intimacy. She would look to that. She might mention. . . . But what was there to tell? Mrs. Ascott had not sinned, as Adelaide Marksley had. Herein lay the crux of the whole matter. Still . . . she was a dangerous woman. Larimore must be watched.

XV Masked Benefaction

I

The day following her illuminating talk with her non-conformist neighbour, Mrs. Trench remained in bed. To some women a headache is a godsend. It obviates the necessity for explanation. When she emerged from the darkened room, she brought with her all the marks of physical illness, to account for the rasped state of her nerves; but to her son, at least, the evidence was not convincing. He had witnessed too many narrow brushes with Death, when Lavinia had something important to attain or conceal. Had she waited, she might have seized on a ready-made cause for a period of bad humour . . . the outcome of the Marksley building competition. On Saturday afternoon the contest was settled, and Larimore Trench was not the winner. The prize had gone to a Chicago architect. That was not the worst of it. Mrs. Marksley wrote Lary a letter, informing him that his plans were too stiff and old-fashioned; but that she would like to buy from him the design for the cow barn, which was better in some respects than the one the up-to-date architect had made.

"You remember, Larimore, that was what I said, all along." Lavinia's voice cut both ways. "And if you had gone on, the way you did the cow barn . . . I don't believe you have forgotten that you put the ornament on the barn, to please me."

"No, I haven't forgotten. I designed the house for people, not for cows."

II

Judith heard about it, in a burst of fierce indignation, from Theodora. It was Monday, and the atmosphere of her home was still so forbidding that she dreaded to enter the house, when she came from school. Mrs. Ascott might want her to do an errand, she argued. At least, it would do no harm to ask. But Mrs. Ascott did not want an errand. She wanted the very information Theo was only too eager to offer. From Eileen she had had a shaft of unpleasant illumination: "Lary has crawled in his hole and pulled the hole in after him." There was no iron in his nature, nothing with which to fend himself against such clumsy insults. But Theodora inadvertently revealed the deep cause of his hurt. It was not the Marksleys, but his mother's attitude, that offended him.

"To think, Lady Judith, of those stupid Marksley judges, turning down all Lary's beautiful plans in favour of—" She gasped, her cheeks burning. "I wish you could see the front elevation of the house. It looks for all the world like a frumpy old woman. There's a gable that reminds you of a poke bonnet, and under the gable are two round windows . . . like staring eyes. If I'd gone that far, I would have had the nerve to put in a nose and a mouth. But, no, he has a door between those windows, opening out on a ledge. You don't have a third story door opening on a ledge, unless you want some one to walk out there, in the dark, and get his neck broken. It ought to have been a balcony. Hm-m-m, I guess he used up all the balconies the law allows. He has them at both sides . . . like the big hips that were in style when

Masked Benefaction

III

mamma was a bride. And a coat of arms above the door—the Marksleys never had a coat of arms.”

“How did you come to see the plans, Theo?”

“Hal smuggled them over, last night, to show mamma why Lary missed out. And she didn’t do a thing but roast him again, this morning . . . because they took the cow barn, that he did to please her, and cut out the classical part, that he did to please himself. That wasn’t the only ruction we had at breakfast. But there’s no living with my mother, these days. Papa said he wouldn’t figure on the contract—after the way they treated Lary. And she nearly raised the roof. I guess my daddy’ll put in a bid, all right.”

III

More than once, in the weeks that followed, Judith’s mind swung back to the words: “There’s no living with my mother, these days.” Once she asked Dr. Schubert about it. Might not Mrs. Trench be, in fact, a very sick woman—keeping herself out of bed by sheer force of her indomitable will? To which Lavinia’s physician replied, with a none too sympathetic smile: “Yes, she is a very sick woman . . . but there is nothing in my *materia medica* that will reach her case. I am looking for a return of her old trouble—a hardening of the fluid in the gall duct. She has passed through two sieges of jaundice. And at another time the hardening reached the stage of well solidified stones, that yielded to large and persistent doses of olive oil—a remedy that Mrs. Trench took as a peculiarly cruel and unnecessary punishment.”

“I’m glad to know it’s purely physical,” Mrs. Ascott breathed. “I was afraid it was . . . spleen.”

Dr. Schubert’s eyes twinkled.

“Your neighbour’s liver trouble originates in her

spleen. You'll say my anatomy is defective; but Mrs. Trench's body is the victim of an abnormal mind. To be physically unfit always infuriates her. Her passionate outbursts always react on that highly important gland, that nature designed for the cleansing of the physical body. Result? A clogged liver and a worse fit of temper. Poor David! He is so fine. Life ought to have given him velvet instead of gravel."

At no time did Lavinia take to her bed for more than a few hours, and then only when some personal triumph was to be gained by a direct appeal to the sympathy of her family. If she harboured a feeling of ill-will against her neighbour, it was in effect to class her with those of her own household. She seldom glanced into the garden across the low stone barrier, and when she walked from the kitchen stoop to David's shop, at the lower end of her own domain, she went with head inclined, as if she were battling against a furious northern gale. Even Theodora was beginning to practice caution, and a less amiable maid than Drusilla would have given notice, long ago.

Larimore and his mother were icily polite, as was their wont when no other form of civil intercourse was possible. The coldness began the day after Mrs. Trench taunted her son with his failure to win the Marksley commission. But her smug "I told you so" had little to do with the prolonged siege. Lary would have forgiven her. His father had schooled him not to hold her accountable for the bitter things she said. You could reason with Theodora; but Lavinia. . . .

No, the rancour was not on this side. His had been the triumph. His mother had sought to deliver a blow that must shatter his dearest idol—and the blow had missed the mark. Dutton was wont to say that nobody ever got ahead of Vine Trench. And in this case it was

Lavinia who defeated herself. So much the worse for Larimore, who had parried the thrust with a foreknowledge that staggered and infuriated her.

IV

It was the Friday following the close of the competition, and there were indications of a coming thaw in the big Colonial house. The girls had betaken themselves to Mrs. Ascott's arbour, as soon as dinner was over. They spent every available minute at Vine Cottage—to make up for their mother's open hostility. And their mother, seeing how happy they were, had dispatched Larimore to tell them that they were to accompany her to Mrs. Henderson's on some inconsequential errand. When they had gone, Lary let himself wearily down on the bench at Mrs. Ascott's side. All the boyishness was gone from his face and his eyes were deeply circled and dull. No word passed between them. The man reflected, feeling the warm presence so close to him, that most women chattered, preached or philosophized without cessation, as if the one thing demanded of femininity were an unbroken flow of talk. Judith Ascott knew when speech was obtrusive. She knew, too, when to break the thread of Lary's morbid musings.

"Have you been watching that sunset? Theo called my attention to it, before you came out. She saw, in those clouds, the form of a woman with streaming red curls. 'The red-haired wife of the sun,' she called it. Now the locks are straight and almost gray. I never saw such sunsets as you have here, not even in Italy."

"I didn't know what bewitching colour effects we had, until I began to sit here on this bench with you. My father has often called us to enjoy a peculiarly beautiful sky with him. Mamma usually spoils it by reminding

him that all the wealth of tints is produced by particles of dirt in the atmosphere. She hates dirt, even when it reveals itself in a form that doesn't menace her house-keeping. If she had gone on living in Olive Hill, I believe she would have died of disgust."

"Does the town—the immediate environment—make any difference, Lary? Olive Hill or Springdale, Florence or Pelham. I have been as wretchedly unhappy and . . . alone . . . in a crowded Paris café as ever I was on the deck of a steamer, in mid-ocean, when I wanted to climb overboard and end it, in the inviting black water."

"You? Judith! I thought your life had been eminently satisfactory—barring the one sorrow."

"You must not think I have been a happy woman. I have only been a coward—shutting the trap door on my failures. But I don't want to talk about myself. I have a favour to ask. Will you—" Her voice took on the quality of appeal.

"What is it, Judith? A favour?"

She drew from its envelope a letter that had come, that afternoon, from her attorney. His partner, Mr. Sanderson, was planning to build a home on Long Island, as a wedding gift to his only daughter. She knew the girl's taste. She wanted to send the plans that Mrs. Marksley had rejected. With such entrée as the Sandersons could give him, Larimore Trench ought to find success in New York. He was wasting his talents in Springdale.

"It's good of you, my dear. But that kind of success—or failure—doesn't mean much to me."

"Then what would satisfy you, Lary? You have so much ability."

"A little of the right kind of recognition—perhaps. I used to think I would experience the thrill at the accep-

tance of a poem or essay by some discriminating editor. The first time such an acceptance came, it left me numb and cold with disappointment . . . in myself, I mean—my inability to rise to the occasion.”

“May I tell you what you want—what you demand of life?” Some one had struck a match in her darkness.

“I—wish you would.”

“The thing you have attained, Lary, the height you have reached . . . is under your feet. You—you are superior to it. The only thing that could satisfy you is—” she paused, a fervid instant—“the unattainable.”

Larimore Trench turned and looked into her eyes.

Dusk had settled on the garden, but Luna’s fire illuminated her face. His body stiffened, and a dull anguish smote him.

“Judith—God help me—the unattainable is . . . you!”

V

Judith Ascott had dreamed of the time when love should come, not such love as Raoul had given her in her romantic girlhood. Nor that other love, that had marched with slow musical cadence into the discord of her early maturity. It must be the masterful love, austere and tender, a discipline and a refuge for her unruly spirit. And now it was come . . . the only love that had ever mattered to her—the only man she had known whose very faults and weaknesses were precious, and she had but one impulse—to fold him in her arms and soothe his aching spirit. Was this love? Or mayhap the thwarted motherhood within her, that perceived in Lary and Eileen the void left by the rebellious aversion of the woman who was their mother in the flesh? A

long moment she scrutinized, challenged the stranger that had arisen, unheralded and undesired, in her own heart. Then she said, resolutely:

"No, Lary. I am the unattainable, only so long as I retain the wisdom to hold myself beyond your reach. I should prove as disappointing as all the others—the achievements that were to give you joy. The real Judith is not the peerless being your imagination has fashioned. Would you shrink from me in repugnance and horror if I should tell you that my husband is not dead?"

"You are another man's wife?"

"I was. The divorce was granted a few days before I came to Springdale, less than three months ago."

Lary breathed a sigh so sharp that it cut him like a knife.

"But that isn't all. There was another man . . . a man I fancied I loved. Perhaps I pitied him. Most of all, I pitied myself. I was more than willing to listen to his arguments. We would go to some place where no one knew us. We had not the courage to brush away the falsehoods and conventions of society. I faced all the consequences. It was no impulse of youth. I was twenty-five, and had been married almost seven years. We both knew what we were doing when I told him I would go."

All at once she felt the man at her side shrink—involuntarily, she was sure. It was as if his body had repulsed her, while his mind was striving to be just, even magnanimous. She had thought it all out, after Theodora's revelation, knowing that some day Lary would come to her with the pure white offering of his love. And she had resolved to tell him of Herbert Faulkner—not the fiasco, but the fact of her elopement. Perhaps it was this submerged thought that had leaped to the

surface, in her talk with Lary's mother. With him she would not take refuge in the timely intervention of a broken axle and a prudent father. Her sin was as complete as if she had carried elopement to its inevitable conclusion. He must hear the story in all its sordid aspect. She waited for him to speak. The clear outline of his face cut the shadow, incisive and still as an Egyptian profile in stone. Not a quiver of the lips betrayed his emotion. Yet Judith Ascott knew she had dealt him the cruellest blow of his life.

"You won't let it interfere with our friendship, Lary?" It was a stupid, girlish question, such as Eileen or Kitten Henderson might have asked. She felt incredibly young and inexperienced. When the man spoke, his voice was hoarse with pain.

"I don't want friendship. I want, oh, God! the unattainable. Judith, it is not what you have done. I am not such a cad as to judge you. I long since freed myself from the tyranny of an absolute thing called virtue. That isn't the—the obstacle. At bottom I am a selfish brute, jealous and unreasonable. If there is another man in the world who has meant that much to you. . . . Oh, not that I blame him. If I had known you when you were another man's wife, I wouldn't have scrupled to take you from him. You are my other self. I have known it—from the moment I looked into your eyes, under the little apricot lamp. All my life I have been heart-hungry, wanting something I couldn't find. Zeus cleft us apart, in the beginning of time. And now that you are here—" He set his teeth hard and his frame shook.

A long, long time they sat silent. The night settled about them and clouds covered the face of the moon. In the great house next door, lights gleamed here and there

as the family came home and prepared for bed. Mrs. Trench had arrived in Hal Marksley's touring car, with the girls. Apparently they had been for a ride. As she went to the back door, to be sure Drusilla had put out the milk bottles, she caught sight of the two motionless figures in the summer house. She went to the sun room and turned on a light that shimmered faintly through the Venetian blinds. Judith saw, without perceiving it. The whole irony of life lay between her and that impatient light.

The tower clock chimed eleven, when, like a stage illumination, the garden was bathed in golden glory. With a single impulse the two on the settee turned and looked up through the roof of the summer house, where the vines were thin. And there, in a little clear blue lake, piled high around the marge with mountains of sombre clouds, the yellow moon floated, serene and detached. Lary took the fevered hands between his cold, moist palms.

"Will you wait for me . . . wait till I can search myself? Perhaps there is a man, hidden somewhere in the husk of me. If I find him . . . I will come and lay him at your feet."

VI

Mrs. Trench was waiting for her son. She had dalled too long with that warning. She was in the door of the sun room at the first sound of his key in the lock.

"Larimore!" as he crossed the hall and made for the stairs.

"Yes, mamma. Why aren't you in bed?"

"I have something to say to you. I don't often meddle in your affairs; but there come times when it is a mother's duty to speak. I wish you would be a little

more careful in your associations with that Mrs. Ascott. She isn't the pure, virtuous woman we thought her. She told me—in the most brazen way—that her husband ran away to Africa with another woman. Though what anybody would want to go to Africa for— But he wasn't entirely to blame for leaving her. She had an affair with another man. A low scoundrel who pretended to be her husband's friend. She told me, without the least bit of shame, that the only thing that saved her from breaking her marriage vow was—her father catching up with them, when the axle of their automobile broke—before they reached the yacht that they were going to Italy in . . . alone . . . not a touring party. Alone!"

The words poured forth in a disorderly phalanx. Larimore stood patiently waiting until the need for breath stopped her utterance. Then he said incisively:

"So there was a broken axle."

And in a flash Lavinia knew that she had lifted a load of doubt and misery from her son's mind—had destroyed, with her revelation, the barrier that stood between him and Judith Ascott. He could hear the grinding of her sharp teeth as he turned and ascended the stairs.

XVI Coming Storm

I

Mrs. Ascott and Theodora were up in the attic searching through trunks and boxes for a fan that would harmonize with Eileen's graduating dress. Lavinia had made a special trip to St. Louis in quest of accessories, and had returned with a marvel of lacquer sticks and landscape, befitting a mandarin's banquet board—and Lary had said things that threw the family into a superlative state of stress.

"Mamma and my brother don't gee worth a cent," the child lamented, peering with eager eyes into the shadowy recesses of a chest that ought to yield treasure. "For the last month, they're on each other's nerves all the time. It's mostly Lary's fault . . . and . . . I believe he does it to save papa. My poor daddy can't do a blessed thing the way it ought to be. And you know, mamma gets good and mad at only one of us at a time. Eileen says, if she felt that way about her people, she'd clean up the whole bunch at once, and get it out of her 'cistern.' But mamma's just naturally economical, and this way she can make her grouches go farther. We thought Drusilla would quit us, last week, because mamma laid her out so hard—when she scorched the bottom layer of a short cake. So I guess it was a good thing Lary said what he did about the fan."

"Lightning rod for Drusilla," Larimore Trench called, from the foot of the narrow stairway. "You don't mind

if I come up? I'd like to see the old attic again." His face was beaming and his gesture catlike as he mounted the steep stairs. "Bob and Syd and I used to have some wild times up here. I wonder if the ghosts of our youth ever disturb your slumbers, sweet Lady Judith. We were a rough trio, in our day."

"You and Sydney Schubert rough! I wonder what you would call my two incorrigible brothers."

"Yes, but they were," Theo broke in. "Bob could get them to do anything. We got awful quiet at our house after he went away. Come over here, Lary, where you can get the breeze. I'll let you have half of my box to sit on." With a wisp of paper she wiped the dust from the top of a packing case that bore in bold black letters the legend: "Books—Keep Dry."

"Look at this, Lady Judith!" The small frame shook with reminiscent mirth. "It belongs to mamma . . . twenty volumes of general information, in doses to match the monthly payments. 'Keep Dry!' You couldn't wet 'em with a fire hose. We had to leave them here, because Lary planned the book-cases, in the other house, so that they wouldn't quite go in. And mamma had one awful set-to with Professor Ferguson when he had the nerve to use her box of canned culture to lay out his herbarium specimens for mounting. Sylvia said it taught mamma a lesson. If she wanted to rent Vine Cottage, she couldn't go on deciding how often the silver must be polished, and what the tenant could do with the old plunder she left in the attic. *Plunder!* Think of it!"

"She has been an exemplary 'landlord' since I have been here," Judith said, ignoring Lary and his too evident embarrassment. "I don't in the least mind her ordering Dutton around. It saves my humiliating myself in the eyes of my gardener. How was I to know

that you can't grow sweet potatoes from seed, and that Brussels sprouts aren't good until after frost?"

II

Down on the street there was a harsh grinding of brakes and an excited cry, as Hal Marksley's car stopped so abruptly as to precipitate Eileen from her seat. Theodora darted to the window, cupped her hands around her mouth, and shouted:

"Come on up. Mrs. Ascott's got three fans for you to choose from."

A moment later, two pairs of feet were heard ascending the stairs. A swift sense of impending disaster sent Theo's glance from the face of her hostess to that of her brother. She wondered how she ought to have worded her invitation so that Hal could not have assumed it to include him. A young man of fine breeding would not need to be told that she was not asking him to Mrs. Ascott's attic, when Mrs. Ascott had never invited him to her reception room. He just didn't know how to discriminate. Lately Eileen didn't seem to discriminate, either. She should have told Hal not to come. He would be terribly embarrassed, meeting Lary. But of course neither of them knew Lary was there.

If young Marksley knew he was not welcome in the sultry store room of Vine cottage, he gave no token. Eileen's breathless condition, when she reached the top of the steep stair, gave him a momentary conversational advantage.

"I'm going over to my sister's to dinner, this evening, and the kid and I were wondering how we'd put in the time till the rest of the folks arrive."

"You don't mean you're going to *eat* again—just com-

ing from Ina's graduation party!" Theodora gasped. "What did she serve?"

"Oh, the usual sumptuous Stevens spread. What did she have, Eileen? All I can remember is that Kitten said she borrowed the microtome from the lab. to cut the sandwiches. I believe there was an olive apiece, by actual count."

"Don't you remember, Hal? The feast began with frappéd essence of rose fragrance, served in cocktail glasses, with hearts of doughnuts. Then there was a salad of last year's ambitions and next year's hopes. And something to drink that had a reminiscent flavour of coffee. But her china was lovely. She borrowed most of it from Mrs. Marksley. That's how Hal came to be invited with the preps. Gee, when I ask a bunch of hungry kids to my house, I *feed* 'em. But then, I know how to cook. And I don't have to be so desperately dainty, for fear of blundering in the menu."

"You might have waited for some one else to say that," Larimore rebuked.

"Huh! it's a poor dog that can't wag its own tail. Besides, I can't remember when you or any of my family made me duck to keep from being pelted with praise. That poor boy is almost starved. He pretended he didn't like olives, so that I could have two. And he was about to smuggle another sandwich when Mrs. Stevens told what they charge for a beef tongue, and how it shrinks in cooking."

"Yes," the youth roared, "when you go to Ina's for a meal, your œsophagus rings a bell every time you swallow. Her mother makes you feel as if you were eating the grocery bill. We eat like pigs at our house—all but sister, and she's sure no recommendation

for the æsthetic diet. She'd be a stunner, with a little more meat on her bones."

Eileen flushed and changed the subject. A few minutes later, Hal lounged across the room to where Lary and Theo sat silently side by side. He began, in a tone that sought to be intimate:

"I say, old man, it was a rotten shame about those plans. I was just as sorry as could be. But my mother—"

"One doesn't speak of such things," Larimore said curtly.

Judith saved the situation by the timely intervention of the fan—a woman's device that evoked from Lary gratitude, from Theo worship. An exclamation of delight, a moment's perplexed comparison, a hasty choice, and Eileen and her uncouth cavalier were gone.

III

When Theodora looked from the window, some minutes later, the two were crossing the street in the direction of the Nims' house. A full minute she stood, perplexed. Then her chest heaved with futile indignation. In that minute, the scattered troubles of the past six weeks had danced into form, like iron filings on the glass disc, when Sydney drew his violin bow across its vibrating edge. She understood. Mamma had given permission for Eileen to go with Hal to Mrs. Nims'—to dinner. After all she had said about Mrs. Nims! A quarrel with papa was inevitable. *Mamma wanted to provoke a quarrel with papa.* There was no other explanation. Things had gone from bad to worse, with only an occasional rift in her mother's lowering sky. Whatever the cause of her displeasure, it had reached a climax. Something must be done to protect papa—done quickly.

Lary was not always tactful—when people acted that way. And mamma always took it out on papa, when Lary got the best of her.

"Lady Judith, couldn't you call her to come right back here . . . eat dinner with you?" The plea tumbled from the inchoate depth of her distress. Mrs. Ascott and Lary interrupted a flow of intimate talk, to look at the pale face and the preternaturally bright eyes.

"What, darling?"

"Eileen! I think my mother has gone crazy. First she says Mrs. Nims isn't fit for a decent woman to speak to—when papa talked about Christian charity—and now she lets Eileen go over there to dinner."

"How do you know that, baby?"

"Well, Lary Trench, look for yourself. I guess I can put two and two together. If I didn't want papa to think Mrs. Nims was a dangerous woman—I wouldn't tell him that Christ himself couldn't save her. Either my mother hasn't got any system at all . . . or . . . she wants to have one awful row with my father."

"We might as well face a sickeningly unpleasant situation," Larimore said to Judith. "You are seeing my mother at her absolute worst. Something has occurred to annoy her, desperately. And we can't even surmise what it is. The baby and I have laid plots to trap her into betraying the cause of her hurt. But only last night we acknowledged ourselves beaten."

"May I confess that I have been trying, too, at Dr. Schubert's suggestion? He tells me that this state of her mind may lead to serious consequences. Some obscure liver trouble, I believe."

"Not obscure," Lary amended. "Dr. Schubert understands its pathological aspect. It is the mental cause that baffles all of us. Gall stones are not uncom-

mon in women of my mother's temperament. She has too much energy for the small engine she has to operate. Her physician has tried to impress on her the need for keeping herself tranquil. He might as well advise a tornado to be calm and rational."

"Yet she does take advice from him—if he makes it specific and definite."

"You have the index to my mother's mind—that cost me years of search. She learns one thing at a time. She has no faculty for making logical deductions. When she tries to apply a known principle to a new set of conditions the chances are nine to one that she will go wrong."

As he spoke, the woman's eyes turned to Theodora . . . impelled by some unrecognized attraction. The little head was nodding in sage approval. She was only half conscious of what those two were saying. The fact that it was intimate—confidential—sufficed. Things were coming on, entirely to her liking. It was almost the end of June, and she wanted to be sure there would be no backslidings, while she and her mother were in Minneapolis, the following month. She had never been anywhere—excepting the week in St. Louis for the Exposition, when she was seven—and a trip up the river on a steamer had been particularly alluring. Now she would almost rather not go. She might be needed. Oh, not to patch up a quarrel! Lary and Lady Judith were too wellbred for that. But Lary did need to have his courage bucked up, now and then.

She was only a child, she reflected, but she knew that when people were in love, they had no business mooning around in the dark—in *separate yards*. She could go over the wall without touching anything but her hands. And Lary was much more athletic than she. Besides,

the gate was there—even if mamma did padlock it, one morning. What if Lady Judith should try to go through that gate—and have her feelings hurt!

IV

Theodora glanced up from her troubled musings to perceive that she was quite alone in the attic. They had gone and left her. They had forgotten all about her. She sprang from the packing case and danced for joy. It was the first time in all her life that Lary had forgotten her. It was the best omen of all. They were standing at the foot of the stairs—and they weren't saying a word. She paused, on tiptoe, afraid to breathe lest she break the witching spell. What did people think about, when they were all alone in that kind of heaven? Now she heard their feet on the lower stairs. She hurried to the window to see them go down to the grassy plot before the house, where her father joined them.

The rosy picture was obscured, in an instant, as if she had spilled the ink bottle over it, and daddy's danger loomed before her. She trudged wearily down to join them on the grass. Things never were what you thought they were going to be. When she reached the edge of the veranda, a pair of strong arms caught her in a yearning embrace.

"Aren't you going to congratulate your papa?"

"If there's any reason. Did you get the Marksley contract?"

David's transparent face darkened.

"Yes . . . but that's not a matter for congratulation. I figured so high that I counted on escaping. I didn't want it at any price."

"Then what is it?"

"You know, this was the annual meeting of the college

Board—and they elected your papa treasurer. When Dr. Clarkson made his nominating speech, I didn't dream he was talking about me."

"Mamma said this morning that they'd shove it off on you—after the way the last two treasurers handled the funds. She couldn't see why you would want to do all that work, just to be called the most honest man on the Board."

"Mamma and I don't always look at things alike. Come, my dears, she is at the door, and dinner may be waiting."

"Eileen went to a party, over at Ina's," Theo cried, mindful of danger. To herself she added: "Well, she did. I didn't tell him she wasn't there still." Daddy must not find out that she was right across the street. There had been too many disagreements, and it never did daddy any good to fight back. He always got the worst of it, and it made him sick. She wanted to ask Mrs. Ascott to come with them, and eat dinner in Eileen's place. Mamma would hardly raise a scene before company. As the invitation took shape on her lips, it was halted by her mother's curt voice:

"I suppose you like your victuals cold, the way you stand there and gossip."

The three Trenches stepped over the wall, which at the front was little more than an ornamental coping, and Judith went in to her lonely meal.

V

Dinner was scarcely over when the room was plunged in a glare of fire, the startling illumination followed almost instantly by thunder that crackled and smote. Then the storm, that had hovered all afternoon in the sultry air, broke with the fury of explosively released

wind and rain. Nanny called for help, as the deluge poured through the screens at three sides of the cottage in quick succession. Before the east windows had been closed, the rain was driving straight from the south—and the attic window wide open. Nanny's bulk halted at the foot of the breath-exhausting stairs, and her mistress ran past her, to make good the publisher's injunction, "Keep Dry." When the sash had been lowered, Judith went to the rear of the attic and looked down into the garden, tossing in the summer storm.

Sharp, hissing flames heralded the detonation of thunder such as she had heard nowhere save in the Alps or the tropics. The earth, a moment ago black with the pall of midnight, leaped into the semblance of a stage set with dancing marionets, that vanished in the ensuing darkness to rise again with the next purple flash. Now the wind swooned, lay panting and breathless against the palpitating bosom of the earth. And now it leaped with renewed ardour, gripped the pear tree and shook it as an ill-controlled mother shakes an unruly child. One of the trellises at the east side of the lawn went over with a crash, carrying in its wake a shower of Prairie Queen roses. The Dorothy Perkins looked on with serene security from the shoulder of the garage, her petals dragged, but exultant in the garish light.

The air was clearing now. Gradually the tender green corn slumped down in the softened loam and a disconsolate toad hopped mournfully across the white gravel walk. This was too much even for a toad. With a long, soul-sickening lunge he disappeared in the shrubbery, as the thunder rumbled its retreat behind the western horizon. Out of its dying reverberation, music came floating up through the moist air . . . marvellous strains. Judith crossed the attic and threw open the window.

Yes, her surmise was right. Eileen and Mrs. Nims were playing Debussy's matchless tone picture, "Garden in the Rain," the 'cello blending exquisitely with the piano. Would David hear? Would he recognize his daughter's touch? But Eileen had never played like this. The tones came, moist and meaningful, lulling the conscious mind to dreams, steeping the senses in the drowsy calm that follows the delirium of summer heat.

Judith Ascott felt her soul at one with the garden . . . arid clay, whose thirst had been quenched. She had played Debussy's imagist arrangement, and had rejected it because it failed to symbolize a prosaic natural phenomenon. Now she knew that it was not the rain, but the garden, which the composer had in mind. She had approached the theme from overhead, just as a moment ago she had looked down on her own garden. With a thrill she perceived Debussy's thought in all its naked, elemental beauty—the primitive consciousness of maternal Earth, glad and grateful for the benison of summer rain.

Had something new come into Eileen's playing? Was it Adelaide Marksley's 'cello that made the elusive thought tangible? Was it, rather, something that had come into her own soul? She had been so long athirst. Must one faint beneath the heat, brave the wind and the lightning's terror, in order to drink in at last the bountiful rain? Was there any price one would not pay for such peace as had found habitation within her soul?

XVII A Place Called Bromfield

I

In the morning the mistress of Vine Cottage went out to inspect the havoc the storm had wrought. Dutton was down on his knees, righting the vivid green corn stalks and banking them in with the soft soil. Theodora stood on the gravel walk, watching him with elfin curiosity—his shins protected by huge pads of faded brussels carpet, his fingers so packed with mud that they resembled a sculptor's model in the rough. When she caught sight of Mrs. Ascott she crossed the intervening lawn on dainty toes, like a kitten afraid of the wet.

"We didn't have any trouble about Eileen," she began in a whisper pregnant with meaning. "I fixed it."

"You were a good little angel. Have you a kiss for me this morning?"

"A million of them . . . but only one, now." She pursed her lips with strigine solemnity. The kiss was a rite—not to be taken frivolously. "I have to tell you about it. I don't think it was half bad—for a kid like me. It didn't look as if it would work, when I started in. But if you are in as tight a pinch as that, you have to jump where there looks like an opening. Then I had to see it through. There wasn't any chance to back out." The sentence was somewhat chaotic, but the meaning was plain.

"When we started in the house, I let mamma and Lary get clear inside the hall. Then I pulled papa back and whispered in his ear—that Eileen was over at Mrs. Nims'

and for him not to let on that he missed her. He asked me why, and I told him that if he was any sport at all, he'd do as I said, *and not ask any questions*. And what do you think, Lady Judith . . . he was game! Mamma threw out one hook after another, to make him ask where Eileen was. And every time he turned and looked at me—and I gave him the most awful glances, behind my napkin. The only thing he could think of, right quick, was getting made treasurer of the college trustees. And I don't know why mamma didn't smell something, because it isn't the least bit like my daddy to boast."

"And then the storm may have helped."

"Yes, papa said that was sent by Divine Providence. It gave me a chance to explain to him—while mamma was chasing all over the house, putting down windows, and screaming at Drusilla as if the house was on fire. I told him that mamma was mad as a wet hen—and just bound and determined to start something, with him . . . and he *mustn't* fall for it. Lady Judith, I wish my daddy had more sand. He choked up—like he was about to cry—and said he didn't know what was wrong with mamma. He tried every way to please her and make her happy. He asked me if I knew why she was so cross all the time . . . and I fibbed an awful fib. I told him Dr. Schubert said she had rocks in her liver and that would make a saint cross."

Her eyes danced with roguish mirth, then fell. When she raised them again to the woman's face, they were full of obstinate purpose.

"I guess it was a sin and God will punish me. Well, let Him . . . if He feels that way about it. I'd take a whipping any day, to keep my daddy from getting one. If your soul is so nice that you can't fib once in a while, to help a fellow out of trouble—" She battled with the

futility of language to convey the situation as she perceived it. "Still, I wouldn't want you to think it was wrong . . . telling a story, to keep some one out of a scolding—some one that never did a mean thing in his whole life. Do you—do you think it is?"

"You darling!" Aching arms encircled her. "I don't know how to answer you. We both know that it is wrong, in the abstract, to tell lies."

"Yes, but I never tell them in the abstract. It's only when there isn't any other way." The explanation threatened to assume the solemnity of a lecture on pragmatism. "I have wanted to tell you—ever since Lary said I was a conscienceless fibber. It's one thing I can't make him understand, and he knows everything else without being told. When you want a thing to be a certain way, and it isn't that way at all, you can't use the facts. *They don't fit*. And what good does it do—to keep saying a thing over, the way you don't want it to be?"

"A popular religion was founded on that premise, dearie."

"What I'm talking about hasn't got anything to do with religion. Bob used to say, 'A lie is an abomination in the sight of the Lord, and a very present help in time of trouble.' But I would never fib to keep myself out of trouble. You have to save them . . . till there's something important. If I hadn't told Lary you didn't like the apricot lamp shade, he wouldn't have thought of going over to call on you—till Syd Schubert or some other man fell in love with you."

Lavinia Trench's strident voice rasped the sweet morning air. Theo was having altogether too pleasant a time, over there in Mrs. Ascott's garden. That which she had related would have stung her mother to madness. But Theo's afterthought was a little outcropping

of Lavinia herself. In Dutton's phrase: "That woman'll have something stickin' in her craw for years—and she'll have to fetch it out, in spite of the devil. If you ever make her sore, or do her a bad turn—you might think she forgot it—but the time'll come when she lets you hear about it."

II

When the child had gone, Dutton untied the pads from his knees and approached his mistress. The wind had wrecked the frail framework which he had constructed of lath and the refuse from David Trench's shop, to support the rank growth of tomato vines, over there by the wall. He admitted, shamefacedly, that he "knewed them end supports was too weak," when he put them in. He wondered if Mrs. Ascott would mind helping him. Mrs. Dutton was in a bad humour, on account of some words she had had with Mrs. Trench. And Nanny was no good for carpenter work.

"I'm not much of a carpenter—"

"Oh, it ain't work. It's just that Nanny's feet's too big. She gets in the way. I thought I might call Dave over to he'p me; but he's been out in the shop runnin' the scroll saw for dear life, since right after breakfast. The old boy's goin' through his hells again. I tell you, ma'am, it's an awful mistake to call a girl 'Vine' and then give her no mind to cling. When she's in one o' her tantrums, she wouldn't see the Lord Jesus Christ if she met Him in the middle of the road—and she sets a heap o' store by the Lord."

There was only one way to handle Jeff Dutton. An open rebuke was invariably followed by a day of insolent idleness. Mrs. Ascott had heard him quarrel with La-

vinia Trench in a manner to indicate that one of them, at least, had not forgotten their former state of social equality. The pointed ignoring of his familiar gossip usually proved efficacious. He followed his mistress to the loamy bed in the sheltered angle between the garage and the wall, where downy leaved vines and splintered lath lay in a hopeless tangle on the ground. A while they worked, side by side, the sullen silence broken only by the whirring of David's saw. Judith's fingers were verde and odorous, and the hem of her skirt was adorned with a batik pattern of grotesque figures in the harmonious hues of earth and vine. Nanny would scold. But what was the good of a garden, if one must only be a disinterested onlooker? Suddenly Dutton yelled:

"There! Grab 'er quick! This end—can't you see?"

The next moment he offered profuse apology. But his mistress was ready for the emergency. It was necessary for him to go into the garage and cut another support to take the place of the one that had snapped.

"Better put this 'ere pad on the ground, under your right foot, while you hold 'er up. Them slippers is mighty thin. I won't be gone a minute."

III

Dutton's minute was always a variable quantity, and this time it lengthened itself until the woman's arms and shoulders ached, from the unwonted strain. But she was glad of the interval—glad that only she was forced to hear snatches of the conversation that took place in the shop at the other side of the wall. One of the voices was low and appealing, the other raucous with purposeful anger:

"I can't see, my dear, why you want to go to Brom-

field this summer, when you have all your plans made to take the trip to St. Paul on the boat. You have always refused to visit Bromfield."

"That's just it. You never want me to go anywhere—have any pleasure—or even a vacation when you see that the work is killing me. You gad around as much as you like. You've been away five times this spring."

"I certainly don't go for pleasure, my dear."

"Oh, don't 'my dear' me! I'm sick and tired of it. That's all I ever get. You expect me to slave and stint myself and stay at home, so that you and the children can make a big showing. And I'm supposed to be happy and contented on your everlasting 'my dears.' I tell you, there's got to be a change in this family."

"Who is there in Bromfield that you want to see?"

"I should think I might want to see my brother. And a daughter might want to put flowers on her parents' graves."

"That isn't it, Vine. Why don't you tell me the truth? I would give you anything in my power, that would make you happy. It's this underhanded way you have, that hurts me. I don't care where you go or what you do, if you'll only—"

At that moment Dutton came from the garage, to be greeted by a volley of questions and suggestions. Fortunately, as he worked, his deaf ear was turned towards David Trench's shop. Scarcely had the last nail been driven when Mrs. Trench emerged from the building and strode triumphantly towards the back stoop. For her the universe was a straight line. Everything above, beneath and beside it had melted into oblivion. The line ended in a point on the map of New York, known to the initiate as Bromfield.

Book Two

Summer

XVIII Sylvia

I

Throughout the months of May and June the battle had raged—Lavinia Trench's battle, not with her family but with herself. She knew, as all those in her little world knew, that a visit to Bromfield was not the difficult thing she had made it. Times without number David had implored her to go with him especially when there was serious illness or death in one or the other of their families. And now that she had achieved her purpose, it was at best an empty victory. She had staked hope of conquest on a certain perfectly definite object, and had bent her tremendous energy in that direction—knowing all the while, somewhere in the depths of her, that the enemy lay entrenched in quite another quarter.

In those former struggles, in which she had invariably bent David to her will, she had rewarded him with a period of forced sweetness which he was glad to take in lieu of the comradeship he had long since ceased to hope for. It had been this way when they made the perilous move from Olive Hill, where he was doing remarkably well, working at a daily wage, to Springdale, where he must hazard all he had saved . . . to give his wife the social advantage she could not find in a dirty mining town. But Lavinia had no instinct for society, derived no immediate satisfaction from such triumphs as had come to her. It appeared to David's simple and always lucid mind that she created situations for the sheer purpose of annihilating them. In every crisis in their lives, he had

owned in retrospect that Lavinia was right. Had he understood the situation, a frank discussion would have won him. It was her method of approach that seemed to him unnecessarily cruel.

She had, from childhood, viewed David Trench as an amiable yokel, to be blindfolded and led about by the hand. And now one sentence in his talk, that morning in the shop, rankled: "Who is it that you want to see in Bromfield?" She had been telling herself over and over again that there was no one in particular she wanted to see. Her essentially prudish mind shrank from the naked truth that stalked before her, in the dark hours of the night, with David peacefully sleeping at her side. But negation was not conquest. In vain she declared to her own soul that Calvin Stone was nothing to her. She could meet him without a tremor. She tried to picture him, old and scarred by life—shrinking from her gaze, because of the stain on his fair name. She saw him, instead, a debonair youth of three-and-twenty, the sort of fellow who would kiss a girl . . . and argue about it afterward.

There had been periods, weeks and even months, when the foothills of her immediate environment had obscured that treeless mountain peak in her life—the irreparable injury she had suffered. But something always happened to bring her perfidious lover once more within her ken. Never so poignantly as when Mrs. Ascott unwittingly revealed the reason for Calvin's hasty marriage. She had fancied such an explanation . . . had been sure that the certainty of it would be anodyne for her deep hurt. Instead it had served only to tear open the old wound, to set it festering with the toxin of that other unstudied remark: "He afterward tried to get out of it." Had not Calvin's father foreshadowed this very contingency?

Lettie's husband might sicken of his bargain—might come back to his first love, to plead for her forgiveness and the boon of her restored favour.

She would keep this idea uppermost in her mind, when she went to Bromfield. It not only served to soothe her vanity, but it would be a whip with which to lash the man who had wronged her. No, she would not give him the satisfaction of thinking she regretted her own hasty marriage. She would make him believe she had been infinitely the gainer when she married David Trench. The idea was so preposterous that, given a less subjective sense of humour, she might have laughed at it. But David had been that kind of stalking horse before.

II

David leaned against the wall, his tired eyes resting fondly on the garden where his children had romped. He was telling Mrs. Ascott the origin of the summer house—that he had built as a surprise for his wife, the spring she went to visit Lary in Ithaca, his first year in college. In those days Sylvia was the honey-pot for a swarm of students, and an occasional mature man, and a folding tea table in an outdoor livingroom covered with kudzu and crimson rambler was an added attraction. Lavinia joined them, her cheeks flushed, her dark eyes ablaze with animation.

"You are going to be compelled to get along without me for a few weeks, Mrs. Ascott. My husband is sick and tired of seeing me around, and he's going to bundle me up and send me home to my own people. It's the first trip I've had in years . . . always tied down to home and my children. Is there anyone in Rochester you'd like to send a message to? I haven't seen dear old

New York state since I left there, twenty-eight years ago next November."

"Why, Vine, I was just telling Mrs. Ascott about building the little summer house for you, when you went to see Lary."

Lavinia Trench flushed, not the slow red that betokened deep wrath, but a light wave of crimson that swallowed up the hectic spots in her cheeks, that tinged the hollow of her temples and the taut skin of her high and slightly receding forehead. It was gone in an instant, leaving in its wash a strained look of embarrassment.

"I never think of that as a visit. I went in such a hurry—and then I didn't have time to go over to Bromfield, because . . . you wrote me that Sylvia had a cold and Robert had sprained his wrist. I never go away from home without something dreadful happening. I wonder what Sylvia will say when she gets my telegram tonight. I hope she won't be frightened."

"You are going to telegraph Sylvia? What for?"

"I want her to look after the children while I'm gone."

"You aren't taking them with you—after promising Eileen that she might spend the summer with her cousin, Alice Larimore?"

"A nice rest I would have—dragging two children around with me!"

"They don't need to have their bottles fixed." David smiled in spite of his perplexity. "I had counted on this summer—to break up the infatuation for young Markseley. I thought you agreed with me. It was your solution. You told me not to say anything about it until vacation, and that you would send Eileen away."

David might have spared his breath. The telegram was already on the wire.

III

Sylvia Penrose came home in time for commencement. It was her first visit since the gold-lined catastrophe whereby she was shorn of the coveted "Mrs. Professor," and she brought with her more pretty clothes than anyone in Springdale had dreamed of—outside a department store. Her father watched her uneasily, the first evening. He saw a marked change in her, and the quality of it disturbed him. Could a child of his acquire such a degree of cynical world-wisdom in a brief ten months? Had Sylvia changed, or was he seeing her for the first time, as she was?

David was not given to introspection. The chambers of his heart were filled with the ghosts of dreams and longings that had perished . . . yet would not lie quiet in the graves to which his acquiescent mind had consigned them. One could always take refuge from the hurt of life in the tangible things that life had imposed. He took refuge, now, in his wife's vivid charm, her spontaneous return to health and buoyancy. Barring a certain smugness, that had come to be an essential fibre of her mental woof, she was amazingly attractive.

"You might easily pass for Mrs. Penrose's sister," Judith exclaimed, astonished at the apparition of Lavinia in a cameo pink negligée with wide frills of cream lace. And Lavinia, smarting under the lash of her daughter's comments regarding the morning jacket—and the foolish old women who tried to prolong youth by such ill-considered devices—turned to preen herself before the mirror.

She had fully intended to prime Sylvia, with regard to Larimore and the dangerous widow; but that burst of spontaneous praise disarmed her. She did not, however,

neglect to make plain her intentions in another quarter. Hal Marksley was to be treated with proper respect. It would not be a bad idea to have the engagement—the wedding, even—consummated before her return from Bromfield. Any one with a grain of sense must know that a fellow as popular and rich as Hal—with half the girls in town after him—would not stand such snubbing as he had received from the men of the household. He was of age . . . and Eileen could easily pass herself off for eighteen or twenty if she did up her hair and went to Greenville where she was not known. Papa and Larimore were absolutely insane not to see that a girl with Eileen's impetuous nature. . . . Mrs. Trench did not finish the sentence. She and Sylvia understood each other.

IV

After the train had gone the big house was unbearably lonely, reft of the all pervasive personality that dominated its moods of sunshine and gloom. Early Sunday afternoon David passed through the wicket gate and sought his neighbour in the summer house. One by one the other Trenches joined them. For a time Sylvia went about with her brother, examining old familiar objects, assuming charming attitudes, giving vent to laughter that rippled in measured cadence. Theodora watched her, wondering what kind of impression she was making. Sylvia was like mamma—always sure of herself. Lary and Eileen were like papa. And she—she wasn't like anybody. Just a little remnant that had been patched together, out of the left-overs of the other children.

She came out of her musings to hear her father say: "Mrs. Ascott, you don't know what it means to live with

one person until that person becomes part of your very body. When Vine is away. . . . I do everything left-handed. It's as if a piece of me was gone, here." He slipped a hand under his left arm, and his eyes smiled mournfully. "I am always turning to look for her, and the vacancy makes me dizzy."

How stupid to miss the first part of such a conversation! And now Lady Judith wouldn't say anything in reply—because the others were coming for afternoon tea, with Nanny, an exaggerated cocoa girl in white cap and apron, bearing a steaming samovar and a wide range of accessories to suit the prejudice of those who preferred their Sunday afternoon tippie hot or cold.

"It's so foolish for the Fourth to come on Sunday—and have to save up all your fire-crackers till tomorrow," the child began disconsolately, choosing a macaroon from the embarrassing variety of small cakes in the silver basket. "Hal says the Governor can't come; but there will be a better orator to spread the eagle in the stadium. He didn't ask me to go with him and Eileen."

"I thought all three of my daughters were going with me," David pleaded, his eyes seeking Eileen's. But Sylvia dispensed with argument:

"No, mamma said I was to take Theo to the stadium with us. There isn't room for her in Hal's little car. And besides, I know how I used to hate to have the younger children tagging after me, when I was having company. I've asked Dr. Schubert and Syd to join us, and they'll come home for a spread, after the celebration. Mrs. Ascott, I hope you'll come, too. I have already asked Hal. Syd has promised to help me with the serving. He ought to make some woman a good husband—the training I gave him when we were growing up."

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disappointed lover was wholly wanting. David played sweetheart to Theodora, a rôle that had been developed by long practice. It came to Judith, walking behind them with Lary and Dr. Schubert, that David Trench was essentially a lover—and love must have something to feed upon.

"Will we wait for Eileen?" he asked, when the feast had been prepared.

"They'll be here any minute," Sylvia cried flippantly. Then, in a voice that echoed her mother's objurgatory habit of speech: "For goodness' sake, papa, stop worrying about that girl. She's old enough to take care of herself. Syd and I were traipsing all over the country when I was her age, and I can't remember that you sat up nights worrying about me."

"Young Marksley isn't Sydney Schubert," her father reminded her.

III

It was one o'clock when the merry party separated, and still no Eileen. A light rain was falling, and the coat closet must be searched for umbrellas. Lary lingered at Judith Ascott's door, unwilling to say good night. Some misshapen apprehension that had tormented him all evening struggled for expression.

"Do you believe, Judith, that whatever is, is right?"

"I can recall the time, less than six months ago, when I was convinced that whatever is—is wrong," she answered, mystified.

"And now?" He searched her face, there in the moist dusk of the veranda. When he spoke again, it was with something of Theo's kindling animation: "I don't know what you have done to me. A moment ago I was facing a great onrushing wall of black water. And all at once

it has broken into ripples of silver joy. Last night I watched a great black and yellow spider, playing with his web in the moonlight. He was such a handsome, capable fellow—and the moth was so blunderingly stupid. I wondered if there were not something to be said in favour of the spider. But—you will think me a fatalist, if I finish the thought I had in mind. You will believe me when I tell you that I am not, in the least?"

"No, Lary, I will not believe you—one whit more than I can believe that it was an empty accident that brought me to Springdale—to Vine Cottage—four months ago. You and Eileen and I are caught in the web. The spider is Fate. I begged the gods to burn my fingers with the fire of life . . . and they heard my prayer. . . ."

"You delicious pagan! I might fancy gentle Clotho spinning a silken strand for you. But to sear your fingers—" He caught them and pressed them to his lips. Then he hurried across the lawn in a panic, his bare head wet with the summer rain. Judith looked after him, Sylvia's best umbrella in her hand. She wanted to call him back, but it would only mean a double wetting. And Sylvia need not know.

She went up to her room but not to sleep. Taking down the thick coils of her pale chestnut hair, she braided it deliberately. A strand, blown across her face by the breeze from the west window, reminded her, all at once, of the web. She relaxed weakly on a hassock, watching the glittering drops on the edge of the awning that shaded her window from the afternoon sun. Was the web inevitable . . . Fate? As yet she was free. Could she view with equanimity a future that involved, not Lary and his two young sisters, but those others who were of his flesh? Could she bear the heartache that was David Trench? Could she. . . . Her head drooped

low on the window sill and her mind drifted rudderless on a sea of dreams.

IV

When Hal and Eileen left the stadium it was in accordance with a prearranged plan to meet Ina and Kitten and two of the boys who had contrived the loan of a touring car for the evening. They would drive to Olive Hill for the celebration—the exciting part of it. Competitive drilling, not in gaudy uniforms, but that more useful drilling that had to do with ledges of shale and limestone. It was at best but a poor imitation of the annual drill contest in the gold mining country, where powerful muscles contended with steel bitted drills against the tough impediment of granite. Here the very ledge had to be faked—removed from the nearby hillside with infinite care, and mounted against an improvised wall of mine refuse. It was the best the coal mines of Illinois could afford, but it served its purpose. There were money prizes and lesser trophies—geese, chickens and baskets of provisions.

The contest finished, there was a dance in the pavilion. Hal had parked his roadster where he and Eileen could watch the antics of the dancers. He was not sorry when he learned that the borrowed car must be returned by midnight, and the others must be on their way towards Springdale. He and Eileen would be following in a little while, he said.

"I've been trying all evening to dodge them," he added, as he waved farewell to the departing car. "Some people simply can't take a hint."

The girl nestled close. "Just you and me . . . all alone in the universe."

"Sweetheart," Hal slipped his arm around her waist

and laid his cheek against hers, "it's all fixed with my father. He's set on having me go to Pratt; but he's agreed on an allowance that ought to take care of two. We're in luck that you can cook. And you won't mind a little flat? I can count on Adelaide to help us out if we get in a pinch. Of course my mother'll raise Cain—and I'll be on the lookout for a job, from the start. If they think I'm going to wait all that time for you—why, I can't, Eileen!"

The girl's breath came so thick, it choked her. The dancers swam dizzily before her eyes. The saplings in the little grove took up the dance, swaying with uncertain rhythm, their lithe trunks bending to the tumult in her brain. "Do you love me well enough to get along that way for a year or two? Will you come to me, sweetheart, when I send for you?"

And then the rain. Men and women went scurrying to places of shelter. The thin grove, the pavilion with its dilapidated roof, the mine house—whose inner spaces were always barred to the public as soon as the last workman had gone—these offered meagre protection. Over there behind the mine dump was a corn crib and feed room where provender for the now obsolete pit mules had formerly been kept. No one else had thought of this refuge. Hal and Eileen were alone, the rain pounding on the rusty tin roof to the tune of their madly beating hearts.

V

How long Judith lay asleep she did not know. She was aroused at length by voices, so close that they seemed to emanate from the lawn beneath her window. She tried to move. Her arm, her neck, her shoulder creaked with pain. She must have been there in that cramped

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position a long time. Her hair and her thin negligée were quite damp. As her scattered senses collected themselves she realized that the sound came from beyond the wall. A voice, hoarse with rapture, Eileen's voice, murmured over and over:

"Oh, darling, I never knew I loved you until now."

Some high platitude touching manly fidelity punctuated the girl's impassioned utterance. The façade of the house lay in ghostly shadows that enveloped the figures completely. But out there across the lawn lay the white moonlight, frosting the wet grass with a shimmering incrustation of unearthly jewels. Hal Marksley's substantial form came like a skulking wraith from the gloom, gliding along the thin edge of the shadow until he reached a convenient screen of shrubs, vaulted over the wall and crossed close beneath Judith's casement. He was cranking the reluctant engine of his motor car, out there in the side street, as the clock in the chapel tower struck three.

VI

It was ten o'clock when Eileen came down stairs, refused breakfast and wandered listlessly out into the hot July air. She was pale and her full lips were swollen. Her eyes were set in murky pools of shadow, as yellow as ochre, beneath their screen of long lashes, and her blond braids hung stiff and obdurate. As she entered the summer house, Theodora greeted her with a derisive gesture.

"Lady Judith, tell her what she missed. I never saw the automobile yet that could take me away from such a lobster salad."

"Perhaps she didn't know about it."

"Indeed she did. She made the mayonnaise herself.

Sylvia can't hit it one time in three. And mamma and Drusilla . . . the oil always separates, on them."

"Separates on them!" Eileen sniffed. "Where do you get that line of talk?"

She had relaxed on the oaken bench and sat kicking the gravel with the toe of her loose slipper. After a time she broke the sullen silence:

"I didn't mean to be discourteous to you, Lady Judith. That's what Sylvia scolded me about; but that wasn't what she had in mind. She's sore because I didn't bring Hal to her party. I knew what kind of a frosty shoulder he'd get from Lary and papa. And the way she fawns over him! It makes me sick. He hates to be toadied to—because his people have money. He knows that if he didn't have a rich father, mamma and Sylvia wouldn't think any more of him than Lary does. He'd take me away from that house today, if he had his way about it. He knows what I'm in for . . . Sylvia to order me around for a month. I almost wish mamma hadn't gone to Bromfield."

XX Red Dawn

I

For a day or two Eileen was abstracted and moody, a flaccid resignation taking the place of the high spiritual enthusiasm that ushered in her surrender. But it was not in the girl's nature to remain long depressed. She could not, as Lavinia did, nurture a grouch to its final fruition. Her return to normal was accompanied by a sequence of quarrels with her elder sister, and she shunned her father with studied aversion. Hal resumed his old habit of asking her to meet him on the campus or around the corner on Sherman Avenue. "To escape Sylvia's sticky patronage," she explained to Mrs. Ascott.

Towards the end of the week she went with Theodora to the shady west porch of Vine Cottage, to assist with the drawing of innumerable threads and the hemming of a fresh supply of napkins for the two linen closets. Her lap was overflowing with damask when the postman's whistle shrilled through the sultry morning air. Theo bounded to her feet, her eyes wide with excitement. The coming of the postman was always an adventure, vicarious but none the less interesting. Some day he might bring. . . . No, she was not expecting letters for herself. But Lary had sent away a poem and an essay. And then, there ought to be a long letter for daddy. As yet there had been nothing but a stingy post card, with the hackneyed old Niagara Falls on one side and on the other that offensive old cliché: "Will write soon." And

mamma had sent such attractive cards to all the others, not omitting Nanny and Mrs. Dutton.

After a few minutes she came slowly back, all the joy gone out of her face. There was a long envelope addressed to Mr. Larimore Trench. She inverted the hateful thing in Judith's lap. Letters of acceptance did not come in long envelopes. There was another one, square and perfumed, bearing the name, Mrs. Raoul Ascott. Who was this Raoul Ascott, that he should intrude here?

"The dead have had their shining day;
Why should they try
To listen to the words we say
And breathe their blight upon our May
While the winds sigh?"

She had read the stanza in the back of one of Sylvia's books . . . written while Sylvia was temporarily engrossed with a young professor whose spouse had died. But, after all, it wasn't quite fair to feel that way about people who couldn't help being remembered. And Mr. Ascott *had* vacated the place that belonged rightfully to Lary. The third letter was from mamma. It bore, in Lavinia's cramped writing, the name of Mrs. Oliver Penrose. The little girl raged impotently as she called her sister.

II

Sylvia pushed Eileen none too gently aside, to make room for herself in the hammock beside Mrs. Ascott. Then she fell upon her letter, reading aloud such passages as involved no violation of the family's privacy. The journey had been hot and dusty—not a familiar face on the train from beginning to end. Theodore had met her in Rochester with the new car, and she had en-

joyed the first part of the ride, along the Genesee. She was glad Ellen was not along. It gave Ted a chance to tell her ever so many things, that she would otherwise not have heard.

Ellen could think of nothing but the Stone scandal. Everybody felt sorry for Calvin. For her part, she thought he got only what he deserved. She had not seen him, as yet. His life was a terrible example of the consequences of sin. She hoped he had not forgotten how she tried for years to lead him into the church. She might remind him of this, when she saw him . . . for Ellen had invited him—oh, much against her own wishes—to have dinner with them Sunday.

As Sylvia read, the long envelope addressed to Mr. Larimore Trench slipped from Judith's lap and fell to the floor. Eileen stooped to restore it.

"Whee-oo! Lary'll be down in the back cellar, eating coal to warm his heart," she cried. "It certainly does take the tuck out of him to have the editors give him the back-fire."

"I can imagine what you mean," Mrs. Ascott smiled, "but you are wrong in your surmise. This is not a rejected manuscript. It is a business letter from one of my attorneys—not Mr. Ramsay."

That evening, just as Hal and Eileen were driving away in the little roadster, with Sylvia watching them from a third-floor window, Lary sprang nimbly over the wall and hurried to the summer house, the long envelope in his hand. His feet scarce touched the grass . . . he walked like Theodora in her most charming mood.

"It's the contract for the plans. I couldn't wait to let you know. It might have been the other thing. I wouldn't let myself see how eager I was for . . . suc-

cess. Mr. Sanderson says they are charmed with the whole arrangement. They want me to come to New York at once for a conference. His daughter doesn't care about the cow barn—since she isn't operating a dairy. They would like to have me substitute a studio, somewhere out in the woods. It appears that the bride-to-be is a sculptor."

"Yes, she and Hilda Travers were in Paris together—but of course you don't know about Hilda."

A queer, chilly feeling crept over Judith Ascott. She had forgotten Hilda. She had forgotten everything. It all belonged to another world, a story she had read in a book on an idle summer's day.

"You didn't—let the Marksleys have the cow barn?" she faltered.

"No."

"I'm glad you didn't. A lower nature than yours would have taken a mean revenge—by letting the dwelling of cattle shame the manor house."

"It wasn't that, Judith. They offered me a stiff price for that one set of plans, and I needed the money. But . . . seeing anything of mine in that environment of cairngorms would make me feel the way it does to see Eileen running around with that—" He checked himself, and the slow red—Lavinia's red that betokened impotent rage—crept above the line of his collar.

"When are they going to begin building? The Sandersons, I mean."

"Immediately. They want me to go over the ground and outline the landscape features. I shall probably be back and forth the rest of the summer. They have asked me to serve in the capacity of supervising architect. We don't do things that way in Springdale. But I have helped my father—long before I was out of college—so

I have all the necessary experience. The only difference is that Mr. Sanderson will pay me a fee and flaunt my name on sign-boards all over the estate. I may as well get used to that part of it. I have always insisted that my father use his name, as contractor, in connection with the actual work. It's a distinction I never relished. But if I'm going to invade the New York field—"

"I'm so happy. Have you told Sylvia?"

"No, I told the baby."

"That was dear, Lary."

Larimore Trench turned to look at her. The blue-grey eyes were suffused and the sweet lips trembled. The man wondered why he had no impulse to kiss so engaging a mouth. It was all spiritual, that strange contact that he was experiencing for the first time in his life. Then, too, kissing had always been associated with his mother, the outward symbol of a bond he knew did not exist.

"I am going down to the office to talk it over with papa. They have asked for an immediate answer by wire. It is not necessary to tell you what the answer will be. Won't you come with me? I'll turn the electric fan on you while we talk shop."

"But, Lary, won't I be horribly in the way?"

"How could the other half of me be in the way? Don't you see, dear, you must be with me when my father has the proudest moment of his life. This will be the antidote for all that Marksley poison in his soul."

XXI The Cloud on the Horizon

I

That night Theodora wrote a long letter to her mother. It was devoted almost wholly to Lary's triumph. The following week the Bromfield Sentinel heralded on its front page the news of Mr. Larimore Trench's latest artistic success. The florid paragraph hinted of other successes. One must not infer that the designing of a New York millionaire's country home was a novel experience to the brilliant young architect, whose parents were natives of Bromfield. The item ended with the announcement that Mrs. David Trench was a guest in the home of her brother, "the Honourable T. J. Larimore."

"Whew! we'd better confiscate this thing before Lary sees it," Eileen ejaculated. "Mamma always could pull the long bow; but she pretty near overshot herself this time. You'd think Lary was a corporation."

"Would Sylvia be vexed?" Judith asked. Sylvia was out riding with Dr. Schubert when the garrulous sheet left the postman's hand.

"Yes . . . because it smacks of the small town. She hasn't any better taste than mamma has. It wouldn't jolt her the way it would Lary or papa. Lady Judith, I used to cringe and sweat blood when Hal said crass things before Lary. Now it doesn't matter what my brother thinks. I want to shout Hal from the house-tops. I don't care who knows that we love each other, and that we have broken all the silly shackles that our

stodgy civilization thinks are so important. Papa dislikes him because he isn't the Sunday school kind, and Lary says he's crude and common. Well, just the way he is . . . is exactly right for me. I'm no Dresden china shepherdess, myself. How would I feel, marrying a man who couldn't stand for a little slang—or expressing your real feelings, now and then? With such a man as Lary or Syd Schubert, I'd be a fish out of water."

"Are you quite sure you are a fish?" Judith asked searchingly. "Did it ever occur to you, my dear, that you have been in the water with Hal until you fancy yourself a fish of his kind? Aren't you afraid that you'll be tossed up on the bank some day, a little drowned bird?"

"No! No!" Eileen screamed, her cheeks blanching. "Don't take all the glory, all the wonder out of it. Don't you understand that I am free? You talk about slave-women. Men don't make slaves of them. It is their own selfishness that chains them. I wish I could pour out my heart to you . . . make you see it as I do. Not the sordid thing that love usually is—Sylvia's love for Oliver, that pays for a swell apartment and a bundle of gaudy rags. I want to be free, and I want to show other women the light."

"My dear, dear girl," Mrs. Ascott cried in alarm, "you are only sixteen. You haven't even the rudiments of the system you are trying to teach. Can't you get your feet on solid ground and stay there until you are a few years older? I was wrong when I suggested water. You are up in the clouds. If I thought it would serve to deter you from this madness, Eileen, I would open for you the darkest chapter of my life."

"I know . . . already. I heard mamma telling papa that you were divorced—that you tried to get even with

your husband by running away with another man. It was contemptible of me to listen; but I did it because I wanted to see how bad she would make it out."

Judith Ascott's face flamed.

"And papa was quiet a long time—and then he said that there were some people who could touch pitch and not be defiled. When he said that—it got me by the heart, and I made a little gurgling noise in my throat. I was sure they heard me. But mamma flared back at him so furiously that I was half way down the stairs before they came out of their room. That was several weeks ago—a few days after you told her. And I wondered how it would affect him—towards you."

"And—"

"The next morning at breakfast, he said you were the purest, noblest woman he had met in years. And Theo and Lary and I all raised such a chorus of approval that mamma ran out to the kitchen to tell Drusilla that the waffles were tough."

An arm stole around the girl's waist. What had come over Judith Ascott, that she should care . . . that David Trench's approval should mean so much? But Eileen misunderstood. In a sudden burst of confidence, she whispered:

"Will you take care of the wedding ring, along with the other?"

"You are married!"

"No, but we are going to be, before Hal leaves for college. We finally decided . . . last night. Then I am going to him as soon as he is settled in Brooklyn. Of course his mother must not know."

"I wish you wouldn't do this, you poor, infatuated child. Give Hal the advantage of a little perspective. Look at him when he comes home for the holidays. It

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isn't a summer romance—or a drama, to be disposed of in the fourth act."

"But what if he saw some girl in Brooklyn he liked better than me?"

"Then you couldn't possibly hold him—if you were ten times married. That is just the danger. You and Hal will almost surely grow apart when you are removed from identical influences. A year from now you may detest him, and he is more than likely to lose interest in you."

Eileen sprang up and ran stumbling from the room.

II

When she returned, an hour later, her eyes were red and swollen from crying. She went straight to the telephone and took down the receiver. She wanted Hal to come to Mrs. Ascott's home at once. When the youth had yielded reluctant assent, she threw herself down on the window seat to wait.

"I am going to have an adjustment," she cried passionately. "It can't go on this way. I was so sure of my ground . . . and every word you said was . . . just one puncture after another. I could fairly feel the tires sagging under me. Once I was on the point of writing to mamma. She's the only one who agrees with me about Hal. Even Sylvia has been throwing cold water on me, the last day or two. Says I could do better—and I ought to go around with the other boys to show him I don't care. I *won't* be a liar. I do care!"

When young Marksley came into Mrs. Ascott's presence, there was a shamed droop to his shoulders and he was plainly embarrassed.

"Hal, I have told her everything," Eileen began. "Now I want you to—"

"You little fool!"

Judith Ascott sprang to her feet, but the youth was already striving to cover his blunder by an avalanche of apology. The expression was out of his mouth before he had time to think. He was shocked that Eileen should betray a secret they had sworn to keep. He hadn't meant to be rude. He was stunned by her treachery.

"Well, we aren't married yet. I only told her we intended to be—and wanted her to witness the ceremony, before you leave for college."

Hal Marksley's chest collapsed in a sigh of relief.

"When we get ready to be married, Mrs. Ascott, we'll talk it over with you. Now, Eileen, run home and get your motor bonnet. I have to drive to Olive Hill on an errand for father. I left my car around the corner."

III

At the side door of the Trench home, the girl had a sharp tilt with her sister, who had come back from the ride in time to see—and interpret—the tear-stained face. Sylvia would write to her mother. She would not continue to sponsor a love affair for a girl who had no sense. She would not play chaperone at long range. If Hal had any breeding, he would invite her to go with them.

"Oh, that's the rub!" Eileen sneered.

"No, that isn't the rub—and I might have known you wouldn't appreciate anything I tried to do for you. If you keep on, the way you're going, you'll have Hal so sick and tired of you that he'll be glad to get out of reach of the telephone. I tried to make you a little indifferent to him—and got insolence for my pains. If you had a grain of policy, you wouldn't let him see that you are daft about him. That's no way to hold a man's love. I

kept Syd Schubert dangling at my belt for four years by letting him half way think I cared."

"Yes, and you lost Tom Henderson by the same tactics. Tom wanted whole hog or none, and you didn't get on to the fact till he'd got sick of you."

"Don't, for heaven's sake, use such vulgar expressions. Hal is such a gentleman, I don't see how he stands you. Eileen, I wish you would see that I am doing this for your own good—and to please mamma. I have had experience, and I know what works with a man, nine times out of ten. I'll hold Oliver Penrose to the end of the world . . . by keeping him guessing. Look at the way mamma has kept papa on his knees for nearly twenty-eight years."

"You think that a fine thing?" the girl flared. "If you pattern your life after mamma's, at her age you'll be as hard and cruel—"

"You outrageous, you impudent—" Words failed. "How do you dare speak that way about your parents? And Theo's almost as bad. At your age, I never dreamed of being disrespectful, or saying a word back when mamma reproved me."

"Oh, Sylvia, come off! Mamma says she never talked back to her mother. And then she forgets, and tells the impudent things she used to say—and how her grandmother Larimore took her part against all the rest of the family. But there's Hal, tooting his horn for me. I'll ask him to invite you to ride with us some evening next week. I'm sure he'll be charmed!"

XXII Midsummer Magic

I

Life moved on another fortnight, with little to vary the monotony of motor rides, luncheons, and irritating disputes, and all at once Sylvia's reason for prolonging her visit in Springdale was removed. Lavinia Trench came home! She startled the girls by driving up to the gate in Hafferty's lumbering old cab, her trunk toppling precariously on the driver's seat and her trim body hemmed in between boxes and travelling bags. A letter that had arrived that very morning announced that she would yield to Ellen's pleading that she remain another week—unless she were greatly needed at home.

Without waiting for the ceremony of the bath and a change of raiment, she hurried to Vine Cottage to present the souvenir she had brought from Rochester. Judith forgot to thank her, so amazed was she by the astounding change in the woman's countenance. Such a change she had witnessed in her garden when Dutton, with hoe and fine-toothed rake, had obliterated the ridges and hummocks of his spading. All that had been Lavinia was gone. It was not that she looked girlish, rejuvenated. In the past few months she had made many swift changes from youth to age—had rebounded from dank depression to hysterical buoyancy. This change was different. It was, in fact, as if Lavinia had lent her body to some other woman.

"I can't stay a minute," she fluttered. "My precious old sweetheart is coming home early, and he thinks no

one can cook chicken the way I can. You ought to have heard him when I called him on the 'phone, a minute ago. I thought he'd let the receiver fall, he was so astonished . . . and pleased."

II

During the next few days Judith forgot Eileen, well-nigh forgot Lary, in her perplexed contemplation of their mother. Some thaumaturge, endowed with more than a magician's power, must have his habitation in Bromfield. The most audacious quack would guarantee no such cure of a sick body and a doubly sick mind in four short weeks. Lavinia had subtracted twenty years from her normal age, as neatly as a reptile discards an outworn skin. Her step was short and vigorous, with none of the stumping determination that so long marked it. Her head was carried high and the black eyes beamed with amiability. The very quality of her voice had undergone change. She no longer swung from cloying sweetness to acrid outbursts. More than all else, a half gentleness—that she still wore uncomfortably, like a fur cloak in August—held her family in puzzled wonder.

David moved as one walking in his sleep. He was afraid to breathe, lest he fall to earth and awaken to the old barren reality. When it appeared likely that the mood would remain, he accepted the goods the gods had provided. He had waited long, and the reward was justly his.

One evening Theodora sought her Lady Judith. She was agitated to the point of inarticulateness. Her little brown face was drawn with fear and two red spots burned in the thin cheeks. Twice, thrice she essayed to speak, her throat swelling and her bird-like eyes darting their mute appeal.

"Might I—might I sit in your lap?" she faltered at last. "I'm not so very heavy, and I can't tell you unless I . . . I have to tell you in your ear."

"What are you afraid of, dearie?" Mrs. Ascott snuggled her close.

"It happened just a few minutes ago—and—I know I didn't dream it. It was when papa came downstairs from changing his clothes. You know, they are going to the reception for the Board of Trustees, and my daddy looked so handsome when he came in the library—with a pink carnation in his buttonhole."

"There they go, now. Don't you want to wave good-bye to them?"

"No, I don't want to interrupt mamma. They don't know I'm on earth. That's what I came to tell you about. You see that mamma has on the yellow organdie dress. But you don't know what that means—signifies," she amended, weighing the word with unaccustomed deliberation. "Papa bought it for her, at a big store in St. Louis, when she was going away. And she was so hateful—wouldn't put it on, or even take it with her. And to-night she said she was glad she'd saved it—just for him—because it was the prettiest dress she ever had."

"I'm glad she said that, dear."

"Oh, but that wasn't all she said. She noticed that he picked a pink carnation, when everybody knows my daddy prefers red ones. I was sitting in the window niche, reading a book. Goodness knows, I was in plain sight. And they didn't either one of them see me. Mamma came in first, talking to herself about how pretty her dress was . . . and how happy she was. . . ." Theodora's breath came short, and the black eyes were luminous with tears.

"And, Lady Judith, all at once my daddy came in the

room, and he tiptoed up behind her and cuddled her under the chin with his fingers. And she wheeled around and just nestled in his arms, like a kitten. And then she kissed him—the way you do when you just *adore* anyone.”

The voice sank to an awed whisper. Judith clasped the frail body, with its consuming emotional fire, her own heart pounding with vicarious passion.

“And she looked up in his eyes and told him he was the best man in the world, a million times handsomer and more successful than any man among their old friends. And she wanted to go back, on their anniversary, the first of November, to let all those silly people see for themselves what a fine man he had turned out to be. And papa looked as if he wanted to laugh and cry, at the same time, and his face was as beautiful as an angel’s, he was so happy. And I’m afraid my mamma is—going to—di-i-iel!” The voice broke in an agony of sobs.

“No, no, precious. She is just beginning to live.”

What had wrought the miracle? The absence that makes the heart grow fond? But Mrs. Trench had often been away from home and family, and it was certain that none of her former home-comings had had such sequential consummation. Had she, for some unfathomable reason, perceived David as he was? Had she fallen in love with her husband?

III

August was a glorious month for the circle that revolved around Vine Cottage. Eileen had been wooed by her mother to confession of her secret engagement, and David had given reluctant consent. He was too deeply steeped in his own belated bliss to deny any other human creature the benison of happiness. Hal would

be leaving for Brooklyn the second week in September, and it was only right that the two young people should spend all their evenings together.

Occasionally they went across the street for a musical feast with Mrs. Nims—whom society was accepting, since it had been noised abroad that only three lives stood between her and a peerage. More often they explored strange highways beneath the starlight. Lary, at home for brief periods, viewed the situation with equanimity. He had made many compromises, and this was only a little more galling than some of the others. He found a modicum of compensation in his father's sweet content, and in his mother's almost pathetic devotion to the woman who had rounded out his own being.

"She quotes you on every possible occasion," he told Judith. "If you advised her to forswear the moral code, she would obey you."

"It's a fearsome responsibility," the woman averred. "What if I should blunder?"

"You couldn't make her any less happy than she was when you came. She says you are better medicine than anything Dr. Schubert ever prescribed. And she insists it was you who compelled her to go to Bromfield."

"Lary, you must have read a story—I don't recall the title—one of Pierre Loti's exotic conceits . . . the faithless lover who was tormented by remorse until he went back to Constantinople and spent a night on the grave of the woman he had wronged. Do you think some fancy of your mother's girlhood has been dispelled by her visit . . . perhaps some illusion shattered by crass reality?"

"I don't know how to gauge my mother—now less than ever before."

IV

When Lary had gone, Mrs. Trench slipped in at the back door. She had been waiting her turn. It was like the old Lavinia to know exactly what she wanted. And again, it was like Lavinia to veil her request in mystery and innuendo.

"I want to ask your advice. You know so much more about the ways of the world than I do." She drew from the pocket of her muslin dress a thick letter. "Do you think there are any circumstances under which it would be right for a married woman to receive—"

She was so naïve, Judith could with difficulty repress a smile.

"I write a good many letters to my attorney, Mr. Ramsay. He has a wife."

"But those are business letters."

"Not always. I write to him when I am blue or in doubt. His wife detests letter-writing. She usually adds a postscript."

"She sees the letters—and replies?"

"Why, to be sure. You mean, Mrs. Trench, the kind of letters a woman could not show her husband? I'm afraid that is never quite safe."

"I ignored the first—and the second. This one came on Friday. And then the minister preached that sermon on regeneration through suffering. He said it was our duty to help God to chastise the wayward soul. This man . . . the one who wrote to me. . . ." She faltered, then went on resolutely: "He is very unhappy. It is a man I met on the train—and he fell in love with me. Of course I repulsed him. I told him what a splendid husband I had. And in this letter he says that when I praised David to him—on the train—it was all he could

do to keep from carrying me off bodily—it threw him into such a jealous rage. I ought to be furious with him.” She stared into vacancy, adding slowly: “but I’m not.”

This new Lavinia had suddenly come upon some bewildering apparition. Her fingers twitched, and a yellow pallor drank up the flush in her rounded cheeks. A chance acquaintance on a railroad train! Eileen might have fallen beneath the glamour of such a romance. But for a woman of Mrs. Trench’s age and temperament! It was unthinkable.

“Mrs. Ascott, tell me . . . do people ever really get over things?”

All the fire of her being leaped to her eyes as she put the question, leaving her face ghastly. It was as if her whole life hung on the answer.

“Sorrow and disappointment? Oh, I am sure they do. And, my dear Mrs. Trench, I wouldn’t lay too much stress on the infatuation of a man you met in the Pullman. To write to him—letters you couldn’t show your husband—might be followed by serious complications.”

“Don’t you think I have character—stability enough to—you won’t say anything about this to Larimore?”

“Surely not.”

V

That evening David and Lavinia went out to sprinkle the vegetable garden, their arms around each other’s waists, their attitude that of a honeymoon pair. When the task was done they came to the summer house for an hour’s visit. Not even Hal and Eileen, in the first fever of their revealed engagement, were more frankly devoted than they. It seemed to Judith, sitting with them, that the woman was the aggressor, that she multiplied

endearing terms and half-concealed caresses, to assure herself that she truly felt what her lips were saying. For David these manifestations were unnecessary. His whole being was a caress.

VI

August passed, and the first hot days of September—their discomfort forgotten in the excitement of Eileen's entrance into college. There was yet another week before Hal must depart for his examinations, and on Thursday evening he failed to report, either in person or by telephone. The omission elicited no comment. But when the week had slipped by, and it became known that the youth had departed for New York without calling to say good-bye, Lavinia made bold to question her daughter.

"If he didn't want to come, I'm sure nobody was going to ask him," the girl flung back, her eyes darkening.

"Never mind, dear. These little quarrels only prove that it is true love. You and Hal will make it all up in your letters."

"There aren't going to be any letters."

After her mother had gone into the house, Theodora drew near the hammock where Eileen had been studying Christian Ethics, squinting her burning eyes as the daylight waned, striving to focus her mind on the empty paragraphs.

"What did you and Hal quarrel about? Go on—tell me," the child teased.

"Get out and let me alone. Don't you know any better than to interrupt a fellow who has to bone freshman ethics? I almost had a philosophic thought by the tail, when you butted in on my painful ratiocinations."

"I don't want to pry, Eileen. Honest, I don't. But

you've cried every night since Wednesday. And when you talked in your sleep, last night—"

"I did!" The girl sat up, sending the textbook flying across the lawn. "What did I say? Tell me every word."

"You'd been kind of mumbling, and all at once you said right out loud: 'Hal Marksley, to think I could have loved a dirty calf like you.' "

"I didn't say 'calf'—I said—" She clapped her hand to her mouth and her cheeks went white. "I'm going to have a separate room. That's all there is about it. If I can't keep from babbling in my sleep. . . ."

XXIII Lavinia Sees the Abyss

I

Four days without incident . . . and then Eileen fainted at the dressmaker's. The afternoon was hot and she had stood for a long fitting. It was nothing unusual to the seamstress, but it was a thrilling experience for the girl who had never known oblivion other than that of normal sleep. She went home with a bump on her head, to tell how near she came to being impaled on Miss Denison's shears. Saturday morning she fainted again. It was after a long telephone conversation with Kitten Henderson. Lavinia sent for Dr. Schubert. He was making a country call. In a panic of fear she summoned Mrs. Ascott. When they had chafed the girl's hands and bathed her temples with brandy, consciousness returned slowly.

"I thought I was dying," she murmured between stiffened lips. "My hands felt like clubs, and all at once my whole body seemed to be climbing into my head."

A cry—the sudden baffled scream of a trapped animal—burst from Lavinia Trench, as she sprang to the side of the divan. "What have you done? Oh, my God, what have you done?"

"My dear Mrs. Trench," Judith expostulated, "what has come over you?"

"You don't know what it means. You haven't been through it six times. I never fainted at any other time—and that scapegrace of a Hal Marksley off to college without a word. Oh, I'll go mad!"

Relief came in a torrential flood of abuse, of self-pity. All the store that had been repressed since the early days of July poured its acrid waters over the girl. In vain Eileen sought to defend herself, to declare furiously that her mother's accusation was untrue. In such moods, Lavinia was never careful to choose her words. When the tirade became insulting, beyond endurance, she sprang from the couch and fled to a room on the third floor where she could lock herself in and defy the family to drag her forth.

Judith went home, dumb with anguish. Would Eileen do violence to herself? Would David's heart break? Would Lary . . . She paused, panting, to frame the question: "Would Lary rise to the occasion?" On the answer hung all her hope. After an hour of thinking, such as she had never done before, she went again through the wicket gate. She would take the girl with her for the laboratory experiment—an unusually important one, that called for an extra pair of hands. Lavinia was nowhere in sight; but from the cellar came the sound of mop and broom. Absinthe might give surcease to the roué in the boulevard restaurant but for Lavinia Trench the safety-valve was hard manual labor.

II

The experiment, that morning, narrowly missed success. At the moment when three pairs of eyes were watching with anxious interest, the fumes from a heated retort were wafted into Eileen's face, and she collapsed in Dr. Schubert's arms. Judith turned off the flame beneath the mass of glowing coal and hurried to the consultation room where the girl lay, white and deathlike.

"Unfasten her corsets, quick! Her pulse is almost

gone." The physician's command held an unwonted blend of terror. Eileen Trench was the core of his soul. He could not be impersonal, where she was concerned. At an opportune moment Sydney arrived, to lend a hand.

It was decided that the girl must lie quiet for an hour. And of course Mrs. Ascott would stop for luncheon. Luncheon! Could one eat food, with the world in shambles? She went to the divan, choking with distress. The amber eyes were half closed and great tears welled over the lids.

"It's beastly to be such a nuisance to those we love. . . ." The blue lips scarcely moved to articulate the poignantly empty words. Then the long lashes drooped in utter weariness, and Eileen slept.

Judith Ascott left the office. She wanted to get away from herself, away from every familiar thing. Unconsciously she turned her back on the cross-street that would have led to the campus and thence to her home. How many miles she walked, she could not guess. She was hazily conscious of smiling meadows and orchards, panting beneath their load of ruddy fruit. Winding hill roads, ankle-deep in dust, and brooks that laughed at obstructing pebbles; pastures where cattle grazed, and acres of coreopsis, resplendent with their wealth of fleeting gold, she viewed with eyes that saw not.

When at last her strength waned and hunger overcame her, she perceived that she was approaching a town. She would go to the station and inquire for a train to Springdale. A little way to her left, graders were at work with shovels that scarred the helpless earth. Great piles of stone and other piles of yellow brick and moulded terra cotta crowned the rising ground. In the midst of all this

orderly confusion she perceived a sign-board, insolent with new paint:

DAVID TRENCH
BUILDING CONTRACTOR

She stared in astonishment. Then, by some magic of the mind the solid earth beneath her feet shifted. She was no longer facing south. This was Springdale, and she was approaching her home from the west. The work on Henry Marksley's mansion had already begun. She shuddered as she thought of David.

From the high point in the parked boulevard, near which the sign-board stood, she could see the distant tower clock, its face gilded by the late afternoon sun. And over there on the newly paved extension of Sherman Avenue the foolish little trolley car was bobbing serenely along. She could catch it on the return trip if she hurried,

XXIV One Way Out

I

Early Sunday morning Mrs. Trench came to the back door, brushed Nanny aside as if her redundant bulk had been a wisp of grass in the path, crossed the immaculate kitchen, and climbed the rear stairs. She knew that the mistress of Vine Cottage was having breakfast in her bedroom, and the ultimate degree of privacy was necessary. She was no longer the gentle Lavinia of those seven charmed weeks. All the softness had vanished from her countenance, and her voice was flinty as she spoke. There was no need of mincing words. Mrs. Ascott was in the secret, and she might as well know the worst. Eileen was guilty. There was no excuse and no help for it. She had confessed the whole thing to her father.

"I have been afraid from the first that she was in danger. She is too young to discriminate, and she was madly in love. Have you told her brother?"

"Yes. It was lucky for Larimore that that dog of a Hal Marksley was safe out of town. There would have been murder, and another scandal."

"And her father?"

"David! He makes me sick. He sits and stares at the carpet as if he'd been turned to stone. Oh, why did I marry such a dolt! If he would only whip her—anything to show that he is a man! Mrs. Ascott, you are a woman of the world. You have had affairs of

your own, and have got through them unscathed. Can't you help me? Don't you see that I am distracted?"

"You may count on me for anything I can do," Judith told her coldly.

II

When the heavy Sunday dinner was over, and Drusilla had gone out for the afternoon, Lary and Theodora walked hand in hand to the shop behind the vegetable garden. A minute later, Judith saw the child flitting across the alley in the direction of the Stevens home. She knew that now Larimore Trench would come to her.

Her heart stood still and all her senses swam.

When, after an interminable period of waiting—how stupid the clock that measures our travail by its rigid tape of minutes!—the man stood before her, she saw that his face was white with grief and his hands shook.

"Are you willing to come to us? All the manhood has gone out of me. I can't go through it alone."

"Yes, Lary." And they crossed the lawn together.

III

The library blinds were drawn and the room was hot and still. Eileen lay back in the chaise longue, her eyes half closed, her lips pouting surlily. Her father paced the floor, his blue eyes lost in shadow.

"Mrs. Ascott," he began in a choked voice, "you know the pitiful thing that has come upon us. You have been a good neighbour, and we come to you for advice. We are simple people, and my wife feels that you. . . ." He finished the sentence with his deep, appealing eyes. "I wanted to go to Mr. Marksley and insist that his son make restitution."

"Yes!" Lavinia screamed, the remnant of her self-con-

trol tearing to tatters as she looked at her daughter, "and that idiot of a girl threatening to kill herself if we go a step."

"I won't be married to any man at the point of a gun—as long as there is a river in Springdale where people can be drowned."

"It is a mortal sin to take your own life," her father pleaded. "You couldn't face your God with such a crime on your hands."

"When it comes to a choice between facing God and you people—I'd take my chances with God any day. If I have committed the unpardonable sin, I don't see how marrying Hal Marksley would make it any better."

She sat bolt upright and her eyes blazed.

"What is right? What is sin? You would hound a woman to death because she has a child without being tied body and soul to a man she despises. Hal's mother and father hate each other . . . and look at their children. There isn't one of them that's fit to live. Look at us. We are another family of misfits. And why? Mamma hates papa, lets him follow her around like a hungry dog begging for a bone."

"You insolent girl!" Lavinia gasped.

"You don't know anything about love—and what it means to come into the world all warped and out of tune. Do you imagine that I am going to tie myself to a cad—let him be responsible for other children of mine? There isn't any fidelity in a man who is born of hate. If you knew what a contemptible pup he is, you'd see why the river looks better to me."

"You might have thought of that, before—" David offered gently.

"I didn't know him till it was too late." She relaxed ever so little. "We had talked it all over, and he had

the most advanced ideas. But when it came to facing the music. . . . Bah! I despise a man who whimpers. *He was afraid of his mother.* I could have stood even that. But when he wanted to take me to Sutton, to a doctor he said was in the habit of helping those factory girls out of their scrapes . . . I slapped him; I beat him with my two fists; I spit in his face. I told him that if he was not a man, I would take the consequences alone."

She paused to gather breath, her cheeks burning, her gaze detached. She was living over again that monstrous cataclysm. "He tried to defend himself by saying I had no right to disgrace his family. Imagine! Disgrace Henry Marksley and Adelaide Nims! I told him I wasn't going through life with murder on my soul."

"I'm glad you told him that, daughter," David said, his eyes warming.

Judith Ascott crossed the room and laid a hand protectingly on Eileen's shoulder. "May I offer a solution? You have asked me to use my wits. I know of a case—not unlike this one—a young girl who made the same blunder. She had a married sister who had no child. Among all their friends, I am the only one who knows that the splendid little boy is not that sister's child."

"How—how was it managed?" Lavinia's practical mind demanded.

"They went together to a sanitarium, where not even the superintendent knew which was the wife of the man whose name the baby was to bear. I should suggest sending at once for Sylvia. She and Eileen could—"

"Never work in the world!" Lavinia exploded. "Oliver detests children. He won't let Sylvia have one of her own—even if she wanted it. And he'd leave her . . . if he knew there was such a disgrace in the family."

"Yes," Eileen said with bitter scorn, "he was born in Salem, where they put scarlet letters on women who sin. I guess it's the river for me."

"There is another way," Judith cried, defiant and exultant. "I can take the baby for my own. I will go away with you, until it's over, and you can come back alone, with nobody to know—"

"You mean—" Lavinia Trench stood up, her eyes wild, her throat swelling—"you mean, marry Larimore and palm the child off as his?"

"That—if no other way can be found. We could go to New York, where the building of the Sanderson home would provide the necessary explanation. Eileen might take lessons from Professor Auersbach for several months. She could come home in a year. I would not return until a child in my arms would cause no remark."

David moved to her side and pressed his lips reverently to her brow. "Daughter," he murmured, his eyes overflowing.

IV

That evening Lary came to the summer house. There was a crescent moon and the air was heavy with the scent of flowers.

"I can't let you make this sacrifice for me," he began huskily.

"Sacrifice? Oh, my darling. . . . I have been so hungry for you. I could cry for joy that Eileen has opened the way."

"Dear, my heart went cold when she said what she did about the children of hate. Are you willing to trust me?"

"You born of hate? Lary, Lary . . . such love as

your father's . . . the love that could survive twenty-eight years of starvation!"

The man gripped her hand until it hurt. Then he drew her into his arms and his cheek rested against hers. The young moon sank to sleep; the garden throbbed in the velvet darkness; a moon-flower burst its bonds, just above them, sending forth a shower of perfume.

"You are too wonderful," he murmured. "Judith, I know the man that is in me. I have met him face to face. I saw him reflected in your eyes, there in the library. Now I shall never be alone. I have attained the unattainable."

XXV A Wedding at Vine Cottage

I

Monday morning found Eileen too ill to be out of bed. Dr. Schubert came in response to an urgent request from her father, looked at her tongue, felt her pulse, smiled tolerantly . . . and prescribed a nerve sedative. Later in the day the girl who had twined her baby fingers about the emotional center which in a man of science does duty as a heart asserted her right to consideration. He went home and talked it over with Sydney.

"Use your intuition, boy. I can't have her going to pieces like this. She has always been free from hysteria—so different from her mother."

"She has had her first love affair—and Hal Markseley is off to college."

"Sydney! That thick-lipped youth! Besides, Eileen is only a child."

"You remember the day she was born, and you forget the days between. I have been wretched over it all summer. One night I met them, half way over to Greenville—the night I was called to see the Hemple baby. I spoke to Sylvia about it. And she reminded me of the night—on that same road—when old Selim cast a shoe, and we didn't get home until almost morning. Once I was on the point of taking it up with Lary; but he's too deeply in love to see."

"Lary in love! Who's the charmer?"

"You dear old scientific abstraction. Have you had Mrs. Ascott at your elbow four days a week—and do you think a fellow with Lary's temperament could spend all his evenings with her, and escape?"

"That's—beautiful! But what about her . . . a woman who has exhausted New York and Paris? Would she be satisfied with a simple nature like Lary's?"

"Lary's nature is about as simple in its refractions as a rose diamond! Mrs. Ascott mothers him. I have tried to make up that deficit in his life—but of course a boy he grew up with couldn't do it, as a sensitive woman could. He knows I understand about Mrs. Ascott. Oh, not that we have ever talked about it. That would be too crude for Lary."

"You are like your mother, boy. She spoke three languages—and could dispense with all of them. But we have gone miles from Eileen. I need your help, desperately."

II

While the two physicians discussed a disturbing case, the one with understanding, the other blindly, a different conversation was under way in Eileen's bedroom. Mrs. Trench had sent for Judith as soon as the coast was clear of tale-bearers.

"He—said this morning that he was going to take you and Eileen with him when he goes to New York, Thursday night. I thought we'd better lay out the details."

It was all so bald, so matter-of-fact. The woman cringed, as from a desecration. She turned for relief to the white face on the pillow. Mercurial tears glistened in the dove-gray shadows that lurked beneath the swollen eyes, and the mouth wore the old rebellious look. Eileen was still smarting from the crass, polluting things

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her mother had said, after the physician's departure. She had brought this disgraceful thing on the family, and Lavinia did not intend that she should shirk one minim of her punishment.

"For my part, I don't see how you are going to hide it by going to New York . . . where everybody knows you. All your friends will see at the first glance that Larimore and Eileen are brother and sister. They look exactly alike."

"Thanks for the compliment!" The girl tossed aside the sheet and sat up. "We both have noses running lengthwise of our faces, and mouths that cut across. That's all the resemblance you ever saw—when you were telling me how handsome Lary was and how ugly I was. I have it all figured out. I am going to be Lary's cousin—young Mrs. Winthrop, whose husband was lost on that Alaska steamer that foundered two weeks ago. Ina and I worked out the situation in a play we did last winter."

"And Ina will recognize your situation—and spread it all over town."

"Mamma! Please credit me with a little sense. This story isn't for home consumption. It's for Judith's friends—when we get to New York."

"There will be few of them," Mrs. Ascott interrupted. "That danger is negligible. A few acquaintances at Pelham and Larchmont. With the exception of my father and the Ramsays, who live at Rye—"

"But the neighbours!" Lavinia cried irritably.

"There are none. We can go up and down in the same lift with them for months without knowing what they look like. New York is too self-absorbed to care about any one's happiness or misery."

"But your father!" the woman snapped. Her triumph was short-lived.

"Papa could live in the same house with Eileen for a year without knowing whether she was Miss Trench or Mrs. Winthrop—Lary's cousin or mine. He has forgotten all but the outstanding facts of my life. As for the Ramsays, they would take the situation as I do—if it should become necessary to tell them."

Vine shook her head. She had no words with which to express her disapproval of a city that could be thus cold-bloodedly immoral. What sort of people were the Ramsays, that one could tell them of a girl's fall from virtue without shocking them? What sort of woman was Mrs. Ascott, that she could carry out such a wickedly dishonest piece of business? Still, we must praise the bridge that carries us over.

III

Lary stopped by on his way to the office after luncheon to assure himself that it was not all an iridescent dream. On him, too, Lavinia's stolid acceptance of Judith's solution had a dampening effect. The rose had been stripped of its blossoms and stood stark and thorny before him. A few minutes of random talk, in which each sought to sound the other's depths, and then the man said, as if it were an inconsequential afterthought:

"Would Wednesday evening do for the ceremony? Not that it makes any difference. I feel as if we had been married from the beginning of time. I told the baby about it, and she pleaded for Wednesday. Some lucky omen, I believe. She said there was no use taking chances. I wish I had her philosophy of life."

"I wish I had *her*," Judith cried, foolish tears rushing to her eyes.

"Why, you have all of us—from my father down. I never saw a conquest more complete." The man's eyes

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were moist and shining. "But, dear, the baby said another thing. She wants you to let Eileen serve as maid of honour. Another omen—that she heard when Oliver's sister came from Brookline to attend Sylvia. It presages a happy marriage for the girl."

"I know another old superstition that might apply—in a sinister way. My grandmother was full of them. To serve as a bride's attendant, or as godmother at a christening, she held, was fatal to the little—"

Her voice broke and a wave of crimson tumbled over the fair cheek. A shrug of swift annoyance. Why should she be blushing like an unsophisticated school-girl? Larimore Trench caught his breath, and his heart ceased its monotonous beating.

"You adorable being! You vestal-hearted woman! Don't let me touch you. Judith, Judith, I shall go mad with ecstasy." He retreated a step, and all at once he laughed, a laugh of sardonic triumph.

"Poor old fool gods! They thought they were destroying man when they cleft him in two. Olympus never realized a thrill like this. Send me to the office, sweetheart. I have to finish the specifications for Miss Sanderson's studio. How can a man build little tawdry boxes of wood and stone, when his eyes have looked into heaven?"

Judith Ascott was sobbing on his shoulder.

IV

When he had gone, she did an unaccountable thing. She sent a telegram to her father. It was simple and direct. She would be married on Wednesday. It would please her if he could be with her. There would be a train through Littlefield at four o'clock in the afternoon, and she would have Dutton meet him with the car. He

could return, via Detroit, at eleven the same night. When the message had gone, she fell to wondering what motive had actuated her. She and her father were, as Griff Ramsay had said, strangers. Lary's mother? The thought angered her. Yes, she had had recourse to her father . . . the only available shield against the small-town criticism that would be reiterated, in veiled innuendo, the rest of her life. It was her father who had pursued her—brought her back to the path of rectitude. Such a father would lend reasonable sanctity to her second marriage! Was she, too, in the thrall of that woman, the slave of that cunning, provincial mind?

She sought for relief in the meeting between Lary and her father. Would he see in her beloved nothing more than a village architect? Would her mother be furious—her mother who had approved Raoul?

At six o'clock the reply came. Mr. Denslow was starting Tuesday for the southwest, where he was to look over some oil properties. He would stop off in Springdale, providing he could get a late train to St. Louis. His explicit telegram made no mention of the occasion for his brief visit in his daughter's home.

V

The train schedule was propitious. He came. The instant after he had deposited his travelling bag on the floor of the guest room, he began to ply Judith with questions concerning the deucedly clever fellow who was building Avis Sanderson's house. He had driven over the place with some friends, had inspected the drawings, and had commissioned Ramsay to enter into negotiations with the architect. By-the-way, he had sold the house at Pelham. He was thinking of a princely estate on Long Island—French château style—to be finished before her

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mother's return from Paris. This man, Trench, would be the one to handle it.

"Papa, you don't seem to understand that I am going to marry Larimore Trench this evening!"

"Oh, quite so, quite so. Ramsay told me he would be the one. It's a singular piece of good fortune. I never liked the idea of putting Ben in one of those big offices, where a young draughtsman is swallowed up. The boy hasn't brains enough to go it alone. This way, Trench can take him into a partnership. I'll talk it over with his mother. I'm crossing, the first of December, for a couple of months in London and on the Continent. I'm worn out, and the doctors say—Damn it all, Judith, I can't give up . . . go to the wall at fifty-four, with a family to support. Black specks floating in the air, no appetite for breakfast. It's a dog's life, and they'll skin me out of my eye teeth while I'm gone." He stopped, disconsolate. After a moment he resumed, his manner somewhat detached:

"I was thinking that you might have the apartment. I'm not in it once a week. Hotel so much more convenient. Maids sleep their heads off—nothing to do. I sold off everything, at Pelham, except the rugs and a few pictures that the beggars wouldn't give me a price for. Thought I didn't know what Orientals were worth. Offered me thirty dollars for that little Blakelock. An idiotic smear of red and yellow paint; but it'll be worth money some day, mark my word. And that reminds me . . . Jack has got over his craze for flying machines and wants to study art. The boy's a failure—no good on earth. Perhaps Trench will steady him."

"Larimore, his name is, papa."

"Larimore? Ramsay said the name was Trench."

Judith gave it up.

VI

At dusk the simple ceremony was read, Dr. Clarkson of the College officiating. Sydney Schubert played the Bridal Chorus from *Lohengrin* as Mr. Denslow descended the stairs with his daughter. Before them Eileen walked, her head bowed, her face pale and serious. In the cozy angle of the hall, Lary and Dr. Schubert met them. The formality was a concession to Theodora. The murmured responses were all but extinguished by Mrs. Trench's sudden flood of weeping. When it was over, Eileen said to Judith, between lips that hissed with anger:

"I could have choked her. She just did that for effect. Mrs. Henderson cried when her daughter was married, and mamma thinks it's the proper thing. She nearly disrupted Sylvia's wedding—and every one in church knew she was pleased as Punch to get Sylvia off her hands."

Mrs. Trench led the way to the dining-room, where the bridal party was served by Nanny and Drusilla, with Mrs. Dutton in the kitchen. In the domestic realm of the two households the colour line had never been drawn. Nanny hailed from that section of New England where a dark skin excites the same kind of interest that a green rose or a two-headed calf would elicit. Mrs. Dutton, Judith perceived early in the days of her tenancy, found a malicious pleasure in her own function as a social link between Mrs. David Trench and her negro cook—a link that Mrs. Trench saw fit to ignore, since the breaking of it had thus far baffled even her resourcefulness.

Later in the evening, while Syd and Eileen played poignant melodies, with David leaning over the piano, and Lavinia told Dr. Clarkson of the great Denslow wealth—her daughter-in-law's exalted social position—

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Mr. Denslow and Dr. Schubert talked of old times in Rochester, where the youthful physician had had his first hospital experience, where Denslow, a poor boy with an iron will, had found the open path to fortune through a painful accident and a sojourn in a hospital ward. They drifted to the laboratory experiments, which Judith's father had never taken the trouble to inquire about. This was just another of the girl's wild goose chases. He wondered why he had such a damnably unsatisfactory family.

"I shall miss her, cruelly. You don't know what it has meant to my boy and me—having a woman in the house four mornings a week. I wanted to train Eileen to help me with the experiments; but your daughter tells me they are taking the child with them, to study under a famous violinist. I have salvaged only one thing out of the wreck of our two households. They are leaving Nanny with me. I have worried with six housekeepers since my faithful Sophie died, two years ago."

The disposition of Nanny was Lavinia's bright inspiration. Obviously Nanny must not go to New York—to return a year later and spread gossip.

When Dutton had taken Mr. Denslow to the station, the wedding guests went home. At the door, Theodora paused and looked ruefully back. They had ignored her completely, and was not she responsible for it all? Even Lary's kiss had been abstracted. But then, Lary did not know. None of the others knew why there was a wedding at Vine Cottage, that evening. Only she and Judith understood—and one of them must have forgotten, now that the fairy tale had come true.

She looked at the Beloved, standing there in the light of the little apricot lamp, and her throat swelled with loneliness and misery. She was not jealous—even if

they were taking Eileen for a year in New York. Some one had to stay and take care of daddy—and she could do that much better than Eileen, or even Lary. Another thought came to her, just as Judith perceived her and held out her enticing arms.

“You—you still think it was dishonourable—showing you the poem Lary wrote?”

“No, darling. It was a stroke of genius. You have the head of a diplomat. I want you to do something really truly dishonourable for your sister Judith. After we have gone, I want you to rummage through Lary’s things until you find those two sheets of paper—the original ones. Pry open the lid of his desk, if there is no other way, and send them to me. I am going to have them framed!”

XXVI The Light Within

I

A little while before the expressman called for the trunks, Judith went for the last time through the wicket gate. She and Eileen had been packing all day, and she was weary to the verge of collapse. Theodora had hovered over her ever since she came from school, up in the attic where winter garments must be looked over, down in the pantry and cellar, where the Duttons were receiving orders for the temporary closing of Vine Cottage. Through it all she had been silent and unobtrusive, her face wearing an expression that wellnigh broke the heart of the woman who loved her. Only once did she offer speech:

"I guess it's better for my mamma to get natural again—because—the other way she couldn't have lived."

The remedy that would work such magic once ought to be efficacious again. Lavinia's altered attitude towards her husband was, beyond peradventure, the result of her visit in Bromfield. When Judith found opportunity, she asked:

"Do you think you will be coming to New York this fall? There will always be a guest room for you and father."

"David can't get away before spring, with the Marksley contract crowding him to the wall, and Larimore gone all the time. If he had any system about him, he wouldn't let things crowd him that way. If I was a contractor—"

"Then, perhaps you will come alone, and stop off at Bromfield on the way home. Your visit there in July certainly gave you great benefit."

"How much benefit—no one will ever know!" The black eyes snapped. "It almost paid for all that has happened since. To see some one that you thought was rich and prosperous—and find out that they have actually less than you have—" She stopped, and the even white teeth clicked. "I mean my brother Ted." In crimson confusion she hurried to the window, where she stood dumbly contemplating the street. When she turned, it was to abuse Eileen so extravagantly that she became aware of the blunder she was making.

"Mrs. Ascott, you mustn't listen to what I am saying," she floundered.

"Won't you call me Judith, now that I am no longer Mrs. Ascott?"

Mrs. Trench laughed foolishly.

"I forgot that you and Larimore were married last night. I'll forget my own name if I have to live in this nightmare much longer."

"Perhaps you can get it off your mind if you go to Bromfield for a few weeks. I am sure Dr. Schubert and Nanny will look after—"

"I never want to see Bromfield again."

II

Judith put the puzzle aside and went home to dress for the train. At the station she kissed David and said, reassuringly:

"Don't brood over it, father. Eileen will come through without a blemish."

"If there is any one who can save her it is you. We had to get her away from her mother. Not that I

blame my wife for this. She is the most conscientious woman I have ever known, the most positive in her convictions of morality. She has always set a good example for her children."

Just then the engine whistled for the crossing below Springdale, and there was a hurrying to and fro on the platform, for the crashing wheels scarcely came to rest in the little college town. Judith was glad of the interruption. Were all good men blind? A moment later she was waving farewell from the rear Pullman, as David stood beside the track, Theodora's hand clasped in his.

III

On Saturday Eileen had her first glimpse of the Hudson. That evening the Ramsays called, and then . . . Aladdin's lamp was relegated to the attic along with the other wonders that had survived their day of glory. New York was the real fairy land. From the hippopotamus in the Bronx to the hippocampus in Battery Park, the girl saw it all. Sometimes with Judith, more often with Laura Ramsay or her mother, she went from elevated to subway, from the amusing little cross-town horse-cars that were more primitive even than Springdale, to the thrilling taxicab and the Fifth Avenue bus, with a zest that whetted the jaded appetites of the women for whom the city had long since lost its novelty.

After two weeks she decided that she had taken in all the impressions she could hold, and settled down to her music in earnest. There were daily letters from her father, empty because of that fullness he dared not express. Twice a week Theodora wrote—exhaustive discourses on the city, which her imagination rendered more real than reality itself. There were letters, long or brief, to Lary from Lavinia, with never a mention of

Eileen. The girl wrote four times to her mother, and then her spirit revolted.

"She can go to grass before I'll ever know she's on earth. I suppose she's afraid of contaminating herself. I'd like to tell her there are some thinking people—people whose opinions count—who don't consider it half as immoral to go to the devil with the man you believe you love—as it is to bear six children for the man you know you hate."

"Dearest, don't do it," Judith pleaded. "You must not stir up all that rancour in your soul. Remember what you are stamping on the mind and character of the child I am going to call my own. You owe it to me—not to make my burden too hard. And, Eileen, your mother is no more responsible for her limitations than you are for yours. She was brought up to a belief that there is something supernatural in a marriage certificate. Morality is wholly a matter of external forms. And she has the clear advantage of standing with the majority."

"Yes, she always grabs a front seat in the bandwagon. If it ever gets popular to run off with some other woman's husband—you'll find her in the procession. No! you won't find her. She's too set in her ideas for that. But after the way she cottoned to Mrs. Nims—when it suited her purpose—and other swells in Springdale—" She choked, her face growing scarlet. "I hope I'll never be intolerant."

Judith sensed the thought that had flared up in the girl's mind, from which she had retrieved herself in a swift change of subject. Ignoring Mrs. Trench's reason for that first neighbourly call on Adelaide Nims, after her return from Bromfield, she fell back on the nature of toleration.

"My dear, don't you know that you are just as in-

tolerant of your mother as she is of you—that you are like her, when you justify to yourself the thing you want to do—and spare your lacerated feelings, when things go wrong, by finding flaws to pick in some other person's conduct?"

Eileen hung her head. From infancy she had been branded as a Trench. And now it shamed her to be told that she resembled her mother, her mother in whom she could see nothing but bourgeois complacency. After a moment she said:

"You always get the nub of it, Judith. How can you see the inside of things so quick? I can work a thing out, when once I get a good grip on an idea. I guess I'm like mamma there, too. Only—Lary says you have to be careful what ideas you give her—because she's like as not to apply them upside down. I suppose there's only one thing for me to do. I'll have to take myself apart and see what my inner works are like. You shan't have any such vixen as I was, to take care of. I clawed Dr. Schubert in the eye before I was an hour old. It wasn't an accident, either. I was just naturally vicious. It was because mamma had put in a whole winter hating me and papa and the fool Creator who put all the burden of bearing children on the wife. At least I haven't any such feeling as that. I don't even blame—" Her cheeks crimsoned again. "I don't blame any one but myself."

There were other serious talks, touching the deep hidden things of life; but as the autumn passed these became more and more impersonal. Once a week Eileen went to visit the Ramsays at Rye, usually on Saturday when she could spend the night, and Laura's mother saw to it that the violin was never left at home. In the suburban town, young Mrs. Winthrop was an immediate social success.

XXVII David's Children

I

November was half gone when Judith wrote to David, the letter she had yearned to write, weeks ago:

"We are on the eve of victory, the great spiritual victory that I know means more than anything else to you. Eileen puts in four hours a day practicing. This evening she is giving a recital at the church Mrs. Ramsay's mother attends. She is a great favourite in Rye, where the story of her tragic widowhood first stimulated interest. I know, father, how distasteful this kind of subterfuge is to you; but Lary agrees with me that it is necessary. As yet no one suspects. But we must plan a long way ahead.

"I have it all arranged, even to the wording of the announcement cards I hope to send out, some time next July. But I shall not dare to show myself in Springdale for another year. There are too many experienced mothers, who would know whether a baby was three weeks or three months old. I could not conceal the telltale marks. I don't know what a baby ought to look like!

"Don't say anything about this to Lary's mother. She would only worry, and she might do something, inadvertently, to spoil all our planning. Lary would like to have us accompany him when he makes his next business trip to Springdale. It is perfectly safe, as far as Eileen is concerned, I assure you. I do so want you to hear her play. It is not merely technique. I can fairly hear her soul grow. She is having her growing pains, but they are good for her. She never speaks of the ordeal that is before her, and for a week I thought she had forgotten it. When she brought me an exquisite little garment she had made, every stitch by hand, I knew I was mistaken.

"Professor Auersbach sees a great career for her. The strain

in her nature that will militate against high artistic success, such as he hopes for, is her salvation now. She rebounds from disagreeable things with the resiliency of a rubber ball. Lary doesn't want her to be famous. He only wants her to grow into a good woman. It would make you happy to see the little intimacy that is growing up between them. She doesn't at all see in him the demigod he is to me; but I had the advantage of seeing him first through Theodora's eyes. Tell her how I miss her, and give her a big hug from her Sister Judith."

II

David put the letter away in the safe, with his few priceless possessions. He wanted to see his children—the two whose likeness to him had been a cause for half humorous apology or bitter reproach. He walked home from the office, lost in a flood of incoherent longing. If only Lavinia had never been kind! There was to be a concert in the college chapel on Thanksgiving evening. Perhaps Eileen could play in public. His soul revolted at such philandering with the truth; but he had taught himself to make peace with the powers that were stronger than his will or his ability. He quickened his step. He would offer the suggestion to Vine.

"It's just the thing. I'll go right over and tell Mrs. Henderson about it! The women of Springdale will remember the date—if anything should ever leak out. Eileen is built like the Trenches. I remember, your sister Edith was at church the Sunday before little Buddie was born—and when he came, it was a complete surprise. Nobody suspected anything."

David covered his face with his hands. His wife's bald physical view of Eileen's soul-tragedy filled him with loathing. At long intervals, in the years that were gone, she had forced him to look within the steel-girt casket of

her being, and always he had turned away horrified eyes—to restore as best he might the priceless jewels of his imagining. Could he censure his daughter because she had believed in Hal Marksley, to her hurt? How had he judged the one he loved, the woman he had given Eileen for a mother?

He put the thought aside as wickedly disloyal. Vine was the mother of his children. She had taken him, a simple-hearted boy with no ambition beyond the making of beautiful furniture, and she had made of him a successful business man. He could no longer make beautiful things. His fingers had lost their sure touch. But he had given his children the cultural advantages his own boyhood had lacked, and he had laid by enough to care for his family, if he should be taken. He had not been happy. He knew, all at once, that he had not been happy. He had never thought of it before. Still, what right had mortals to demand happiness? Had Vine been sympathetic, he might never have risen above the rank of a carpenter. His children would have toiled with their hands, to measure the stolid level of Bromfield or Olive Hill. It was Vine, with her far-seeing eyes and her two-edged tongue, who had made Lary's achievement possible, who had given Sylvia the satisfaction of a marriage to her liking. It was patent that Sylvia, at least, was satisfied with her lot.

His eyes turned inward, he began to take stock of his children. Bob and Isabel were in heaven. The acts of God were not to be challenged. Lary had periods of morbid brooding, when life looked worse than worthless. It would be different, now that he had a wife to love him . . . a wife who saw in him a demigod. Such devotion had stimulated him to greater endeavour than he had deemed worth while. It might not have worked that

way with Lary's father . . . if he had had a wife to soothe and admire him. He might have been too happy to exert himself. He could not be sure.

The very qualities which had won Judith were fostered by Vine's determination to send Larimore to Cornell. Just why Cornell, David had no means of knowing. Lary had not gone to Bromfield for any of his vacations. So the proximity of the old home town had nothing to do with it. With all his cultural charm, he might not have won Mrs. Ascott, had there been no strong incentive to action. He was inclined to drift, to shun the crass grip of reality. His happiness had been thrust upon him, because of Eileen's drastic need.

Theodora was too young to be estimated with any degree of finality. As she was, so had Vine Larimore appeared to him when, as a boy, he had looked upon her with yearning eyes. In the after years Vine had been the prototype of Sylvia. She might have bargained better with her beauty—as Sylvia had bargained. What had prompted Vine to the breaking of that other engagement? She had told him, times without number, that he had won her—against her better judgment—by his persistent devotion . . . had taken her by storm, and had thereby driven his rival to a hasty and ill-starred marriage. How could he have taken any woman by storm? He felt a little foolish pride in the thought that for one rash moment he had been bold.

He once heard his wife counselling Sylvia, when she was on the point of marrying for pique, an elderly widower in the college faculty. She could afford to swallow Tom Henderson's neglect, Vine had said, if thereby she might some day step into Mrs. Dr. Henderson's shoes. But Sylvia was in no need of advice. She would always make the best of her situation—glamour

it over with a value calculated to inspire envy in the minds of her friends. It would have been the same, had she occupied a three-room cottage in Olive Hill, with miners' wives for her social equals. She was developing into a snob. David had not known the meaning of the word until he felt it in Sylvia, that summer.

He turned for relief to Theodora, the one who was still plastic. His mind had climbed awkwardly over Eileen. He must do his work, and a father could not contemplate that catastrophe and live. Theo understood him, as none of the others did. She had rejoiced with him in the seven weeks of his belated honeymoon, and she sorrowed with him in the bitterness of the aftermath.

III

"What in the world is the matter with you? Have you gone stone deaf? I have spoken to you three times, and you haven't turned a hair." He was aroused from his musings by Vine's raucous voice.

"I suppose my mind was wandering. What do you want, dear?"

"What were you thinking?" Her eyes were dark with suspicion.

"I—I believe I was thinking about old Selim, the saddle horse . . . you know, Vine, that Dr. Schubert used to ride when the roads were too muddy for the buggy. And what sore places the saddle would make on the poor old fellow's back—and how the sores would turn into kindly calluses after the saddle had been worn a few weeks. It was taking the saddle off, and putting it back on again, that made the new sores. It would be better never to feel relief from the calloused places than to have to harden them all over again."

"Yes! I wish I had never gone to Bromfield. Not that the trip didn't benefit my health wonderfully. But we wouldn't be in all this trouble if I had stayed at home. And the worst of it isn't Eileen, either. I had to give in to let Larimore marry that grass widow. That's the part that can't be so easily undone."

"Vine!" David Trench towered his full height, his face stiff with indignation. "Have you no decency, no gratitude, no human kindness in your heart? For shame, to let such words pass your lips!"

Lavinia laughed, a strangled, empty giggle, while the red crept up her neck.

"I was only joking. Larimore says I have no sense of humour. I think you are the one who can't see a joke."

"I can't see a joke in things that are not to be joked about. Judith is a noble woman and she has saved you from disgrace. We are the last people in the world who have a moral right to bring up her past. We all make mistakes, even you—"

"I made the mistake of my life when I married a man who always sides against me, no matter what comes up." She began to weep loudly.

IV

David was wont to coax and comfort until the storm was over; but this time he put on his hat and left the house without a word. When he returned at dinner time the sky was serene and the atmosphere almost balmy. Lavinia kissed him on both cheeks and turned to pick a thread from his coat with wifely care. Her lips wore a satisfied smirk.

"It's all fixed. I had the luck to run into a meeting of the committee at Mrs. Henderson's, and they want

Eileen to play three numbers. I have written Judith to get her the finest dress in New York—not to mind the cost—and to send the titles by return mail. I'm going to give a big reception, Friday afternoon."

David smiled wearily. Another whirlpool in his domestic stream had been navigated, safely. Before him lay a week of tranquillity. Vine was always amiable, with some such absorbing task in prospect.

XXVIII Indian Summer

I

The trio arrived Wednesday morning, with half the freshman class at the station to meet Eileen. It was all so different from her going away. How strange the town looked, how tranquil and confiding the faces of her friends! What a long, long time she had been gone! Could she ever again talk to Kitten and Ina as in the old life? Could she adjust herself, for even a few days, to the environment that had been her whole world?

The change was not all in herself. There was her mother—kissing her ecstatically before all that crowd, telling her how sweet she looked, how lonely the big house was without her. And—did she hear aright?—declaring in ringing tones that she should not go back to New York with Larimore and Judith, but should enter college at the beginning of the second semester. A moment later Mrs. Trench passed from this demonstration to embrace Judith with equal warmth, to address her as “my dear daughter” and lament the shortness of the visit. The girl was bewildered. Only Theodora was unchanged. She bubbled and vibrated as of old, pouting disconsolately when the chapel bell summoned her.

II

The afternoon was taken up with rehearsal for tomorrow evening's program in the college chapel. Once Eileen was on the brink of the sordid past. She had met Adelaide Nims with unruffled composure; but when

Kitten joked her about her prospective sister-in-law, and Ina wanted to know how many evenings a week Hal was in the habit of spending with her, she almost forgot the rôle she had been playing . . . that in New York she was Mrs. Winthrop, whereas in Springdale she was still Eileen Trench, and presumably betrothed to Mrs. Nims' brother.

"You can't fool us," Miss Henderson teased. "I bet Ina a pair of gold-buckled garters that you'd follow Hal to New York, instead of going to college here. And your mother didn't get by, this morning, with that line of talk about keeping you at home. She wouldn't tear you and Hal apart for the world."

Eileen felt a sinking in the region of her solar plexus, but she contrived a flippant retort, and took up her violin. She had not remembered that Hal Marksley was in Brooklyn . . . that she was likely to meet him in the subway or at the theatre, any day. In the onrush of her first disillusionment he had been carried beyond her ken, as an obstruction of logs and floating débris is torn from its moorings and scattered in meaningless fragments by the violence of a spring flood.

III

Judith, after a few hours with Mrs. Dutton and a hurried visit from Nanny—indeed the Doctors Schubert were dears; but her heart was still with her mistress—found Lary in the hall where, less than three months ago, she promised to love, honour and obey him. He must make a hurried run to Littlefield, on business for his father. It was a glorious autumn afternoon and the road was in fair condition. At his suggestion, Judith took an extra wrap, for the air would be chill after the sun went down.

It was the twenty-fourth of November, and the temperature was that of late spring; but the air held a dreamy content, as if the earth and her children were drunk with rare old amber wine. On the brow of a hill, a little way out from town, Lary stopped the car to point out a great diadem of irregular rubies, in a setting of Etruscan gold. That, he explained, was a scattering of scarlet oaks in a grove composed largely of soft maples. Here and there a flavescent green asserted itself, thinly.

"Walnuts," he said, his face taking on a boyish look. "We had every tree marked, when Bob and Syd and I were youngsters. You have to pick out the location . . . and remember it. The walnut has no community instinct. It seldom grows in friendly groups, like the sweet gums and sugar maples. The leaves are only yellowed, by a frost that turns the oaks crimson over night, and their formation gives the effect of delicate filigree. Look at that sumac bush, Judith—like a great sang de boeuf vase, with a red on the shoulder that would have filled an ancient Chinese potter with awe. The flame-red in the sang de boeuf porcelain was supposed to be derived from the breath of the gods, while the kiln was at white heat. This red, that gives a flambé touch to so many of these sumacs, is an insolent growth of *rhus toxicodendron*, that has run wild all over these hills."

"Poison ivy," Judith cried. "Yes, we have it in New York and Connecticut—all up to the Sound. During the summer, city people often mistake it for Virginia creeper, to their sorrow. But after frost, its coral colour betrays it."

Something on the grassy slope caught her eye, and she asked for explanation. Cobwebs. The shrubs were festooned with them, long streamers floating in the

breeze, like knotted gossamer threads. Over the short grass they formed a continuous fabric, as delicate as crêpe chiffon.

"Millions of spiders set to work with their spinning, the morning after the first hard frost. No naturalist has ever explained, to my satisfaction, where they come from, or what purpose they serve by throwing out all this maze of webs. I can't believe that there is any utilitarian end in view. As if nature couldn't squander a little effort on pure beauty!"

When the car had rounded the shoulder of the hill, Judith touched her husband's arm. "Look, Lary, is that fire? Not the red of the foliage, but that film of smoke, away beyond the field."

He followed the lead of her gaze, across a dun field dotted at more or less regular intervals with huge shocks of withered corn, beside some of which lay piles of yellow and white ears, husked and ready for the crib. Beyond this were broad acres of wheat stubble, glistening silver in the sun. And then the creek, half hidden from view by a tangle of wild grape and trumpet creeper that wellnigh suffocated the stunted trees along its bank. Over the field, the stream, the low woods beyond, was a silver mist that deepened first to azure, then to smoky purple, as it met the far horizon.

"That isn't the result of fire, dear. That is our much vaunted Indian Summer haze. The Indians had a legend to explain it. Ask Theo to tell you. It's one of her favourites."

"Yes, yes . . . I had forgotten. I shall always associate it with Dr. Schubert—the peace that came to him after the long years of tragedy and the final shock of sudden death. Lary, do you think. . . ."

"I am afraid not, dearest. My mother was born in

an off season. Nothing in her case works out on normal lines."

Then they rode on in silence, each wondering how the other had caught the unvoiced question that was in both minds.

IV

The concert, for the benefit of the scholarship fund, the following evening, was the social event of the season. Mrs. Trench was disappointed in the dress Judith had bought for Eileen—a simple affair of white chiffon, in long graceful lines, over a satin slip that showed a tracery of silver threads—until she heard Mrs. Nims whisper to Mrs. Henderson that it must have been a late Paris importation. After that she caught the "style" her village eyes had not perceived. It was worth the price, to have Mrs. Nims say that to Mrs. Henderson.

But Eileen's appearance, as she emerged upon the chapel stage from the sheltering screen of palms, was no disappointment to her mother. As the burst of spontaneous applause died away—the violinist bowing recognition, as graciously as if this were a matter of daily occurrence—she heard Kitten exclaim to the girls near her:

"Gee, isn't she stunning! If ten weeks in New York could do that for Eileen Trench, ten days of it ought to make a howling beauty of me." Then she clapped her hand to her mouth, remembering Mrs. Trench's lynx-ears.

V

The visit was one continuous triumphal procession for the girl. There was her mother's reception, Friday afternoon, at which—according to the formally engraved cards of invitation—the best people of Springdale

were requested to meet Mrs. Larimore Trench. But Eileen, behind the coffee urn, was the real attraction. On Saturday Mrs. Henderson and Mrs. Clarkson joined in a musical tea, and together they prevailed on the girl to play Schubert's Ave Maria at church, Sunday morning.

When it was ended, and Sunday night saw her safely on the train, her mother went home to a three days' sick headache. If she could "put that over" on the smartest people in Springdale, perhaps there was nothing to fear. Larimore had some ridiculous story he used to quote . . . about a boy who held a fox under his cloak while it tore his vitals out. It was a stolen fox, she reminded herself. After all, it didn't matter much what you did—so long as you had the grit to keep it under your cloak.

XXIX The Truth that is Clean

I

The winter wore away. Larimore Trench was too deeply occupied to give much time to his small family. Success had come to him unsought: not the success he had hoped for or desired. Griffith Ramsay opened the way when, as toast-master at a convention banquet, he introduced Lary as Consulting Architect—a title the opulent New Yorker took seriously. And it was Ramsay who looked after the contracts, stipulating enormous fees for the service Lary would have given gratuitously, had he been left to his own devices.

"I feel like a robber," he told Judith when he handed her a check in four figures—compensation for work that had actually consumed only a few hours of his time. "You know, I met the man at a stag dinner, early in December, and took a real liking to him. He had an option on a place, and he asked me to go out and look at it. It was one of the worst atrocities I ever saw—and I didn't mince words with him. It was such a bargain that he could afford to spend a little money on drastic changes—and I told him what to do. I have often given that kind of advice to a friend. I wouldn't think of sending in a bill."

"And it hurts your pride, to be selling your taste."

Lary looked at her, a light dawning in his limpid brown eyes.

"You are the most remarkable woman in the world. You have the insight of a sage . . . and the intuition

of a poet. I didn't know what was wrong with me. And in a second you put your finger on the tender spot. It is precisely the feeling I had the first time an editor sent me a check for a poem. You don't sell things that come out of your soul. To take money for them is like rubbing the bloom from the grape. It leaves your soul shiny and bare."

"But, Lary, an artist takes money for his pictures. It is bad for his art if he lives by any other means. The painter who has no need to work is almost sure to go stale in a few years. If you had been born when Greece was at the climax of her glory—"

"I would have been an artisan—taking wages for my work, like Apollodorus and Praxiteles—with no more social opportunity and aspiration than an upper servant," Lary retorted, laughing whimsically. "The Greeks had no illusions about art. It was as closely knit with the kitchen as with the temple. This idea that artists are fit associates for millionaires—that is, for the aristocracy—is purely a figment of modern times. My repugnance for money is not the result of my classical training. It was burned into my mind by the gruelling conflict of opinions between my father and mother. My father and I were born to an age that knows only the money standard. The world—and my mother—are not to blame, if he and I are out of joint with the times."

"But you won't let it hurt you, Lary . . . let it embitter you?"

"No, sweetheart. I'll make a joke of it. I'll tell Ramsay to double his infamous bills." And Larimore Trench went forth to rob another rich man.

II

Later in the day Laura came to the apartment. It

was a dreary February morning and the outlook from the front windows was bleak and cheerless. Eileen had sat for an hour contemplating the waste of sullen water, and Judith had let her alone. She was thinking things out. She would come to her sister for help when she needed it. At times the older woman could follow her thought process by an intuition that was almost uncanny. This morning not a glimmer of light came through. Scarcely had Mrs. Ramsay disposed of her furs and selected her favourite rocker when the girl began, her face whiter than usual and her lips compressed:

"Judith, I am going to tell her. I can't go on feeling like a dirty sneak."

"You—what, Eileen?" Laura asked, her hazel eyes opening in wonder.

"May I, Judith? You know what I mean."

"If you feel that it is right, dear. You know how it looks to you."

"Then here goes! Mrs. Ramsay, you and your husband have been perfectly splendid to me—and I owe it to you, not to have you go on this way any longer. As far as your mother is concerned—she's been a darling; but I've paid that with my violin. I don't need to tell her. But I do need to tell you that I am not Mrs. Winthrop, and my husband didn't drown in that Alaska steamship disaster. I am Eileen Trench—and I never had a husband. . . ." She set her teeth hard, then went on heroically: "There won't be any name for the baby that comes, the first of May."

"Eileen, are you mad! Judith, what has come over the girl?"

"No. It's just cold facts. I'm not twenty years. I'll be seventeen, the last of March. Long before I was sixteen I was crazy mad in love with a man. It was

mostly my fault—that he wasn't the hero I made him out, I mean. We were engaged and we talked things over—things that aren't safe for a girl and a man to talk about before they are married. I don't need to tell you the rest."

"And the contemptible cur deserted you?"

"Not exactly . . . deserted. When we found out, he said at first that he would be loyal, and would marry me after he got through with college. To save my reputation, he wanted me to commit murder."

"What did you say to him? How did you answer the cad?"

"I blacked his eye."

The words fell cold and mirthless.

"I was going to kill myself, but Judith wouldn't let me. She married Lary, so that they could take—"

Laura Ramsay's usually placid face took on an expression of intense emotion. She rose to her feet and walked hurriedly to the window.

"If you are going to cut me off—well, that's all the more reason why I had to tell you," Eileen said, following her. "It's what I have to expect."

"But I don't intend to cut you off, child. Judith, why couldn't I do for her what I did in Nelka's case? Especially if it turns out to be a little girl. Junior is wild for a sister—and it's the only way I can hope to get one for him. And of course I'd be game, if it were another boy. Won't you, Judith? I'm sure Griff would approve. Why—why, Eileen, what is the matter?"

The girl had flung herself on her knees, her face in Judith's lap, her slender body shaken with sobs. When the paroxysm had passed, she slipped to the floor and sat looking from one to the other with a wry smile.

"There is only one stumbling block in the way, Mrs.

Ramsay—and that's *me*. Judith and I are going to the sanitarium, the middle of April. After the baby comes, I am to hand it over to her and forget about it. Why, I can't. I croon over it every night, in my dreams. When I'm wide awake, I see him, a splendid man, thrilling audiences with his violin. Wouldn't I lose my head, some day—go raving mad and tell the whole thing?"

"All the more reason why it should be in the nursery, out at Rye, where you wouldn't see it. Boy or girl, you must let me have it. The child will be a musical genius," Laura cried, her eyes beaming with expectant mother-pride.

III

That night Judith talked it over with Lary. She had known, all along, that the thought of this child, with the Marksley brand, filled him with dread. The following day Laura came again, with a whole chest of dainty things. She and her sister had made them before Junior's coming, and he was such a robust baby that they were outgrown before they had been worn. Griff was as eager as she.

Gradually, as the weeks passed, Judith divorced herself from the thought of the child. Had she a right, when the Ramsays offered sanctuary to the nameless waif—especially in view of Eileen's preternatural mother-love, and the great loneliness that had been Lary's, before her coming? There might some day be a child of her own. Her homesickness for Theodora gave her pause—and Theodora had not twined tendrils of helplessness around her heart. Yes, it was best to let Laura have the baby. . . .

XXX Katharsis

I

March came, and the layette was practically finished. Judith Trench looked up from her sewing to realize with a strange thrill that it was just a year since first she heard the name of Springdale. She and Lary would be going to the theatre, that evening. She wondered whether he had remembered, when he got the tickets. Eileen was leaving for Rye on an early afternoon train—indeed she must be well on the way, going directly from Professor Auersbach's studio. The train must pass Pelham in a few minutes.

A year ago, Judith Ascott had gone out to Pelham with the buoyancy of a toy balloon released from its tether, to break the epoch-making news to her mother. Now the house at Pelham was in alien hands. Father was still abroad, was still complaining of floating specks in the air and a disheartening lack of appetite for breakfast. Mother was rapturous over the new house Lary was building for her. Ben was eager to get back to America, to try his hand at concrete construction. Jack thought he wanted to be a landscape architect—with brother Lary to instruct him. That would beat the Beaux Arts all hollow.

From one to another of the family, her mind flitted. Had they not accepted Lary without reservation? Was not her own life complete? She turned questioning eyes towards the door. A key in the outer lock. Had Lary come home early . . . remembering? Was he ill?

The livingroom door opened, slowly, as if it were pushing some imponderable but deadly weight. In an instant she was on her feet.

"Eileen! What has happened?"

The girl sank into the nearest chair and buried her face from sight. After a moment she said, in a voice hollow and remote:

"There's no use torturing you with suspense. I'm not hurt."

"But something has happened to you—something dreadful."

"Judith, you don't need to go out of your way to hunt punishment, when you've sinned. And you don't need to dodge it, either. A little while ago I would have thrown myself in front of a subway train, if I hadn't been a coward. Last summer I thought I had done something heroic. But when I saw *him*, this afternoon—"

"Hal Marksley? Eileen!"

"Now you know the worst." She nodded slowly. "If you'll let me, Judith, I'll tell you from the beginning. I guess I'm like mamma in that, too. She has to tell a thing all in one piece, or she loses the thread of it. In the first place, I had a great lesson. I was the last, before luncheon, and Professor Auersbach stopped to compliment me. It was the first time. He explained the meaning of *hypsos*, the sublime reach of spiritual exaltation—and he said it had come into my playing because of what I had suffered. He talked like Syd Schubert. I went out of the studio walking on air. I don't know what I ate—or where. All I remember is that I left too large a tip, because the change came out wrong.

"I went to the Grand Central and bought a ticket. It was ever so long before train time, but I thought I'd

better scout around and see how to get down to the tracks. You know, the construction people change the route every few days. The first passage I tried had been barricaded. I went half way up the stairs when I came face to face with three men. The one in the middle was Hal."

"He recognized you?"

"Not at first—and I hurried past them and into a side aisle. It was a blind pocket, and before I could get out of it I heard him calling my name. Judith, I was all alone. Hundreds of people within hearing, and I was all alone with the man I loathe. It was like a nightmare—my feet hobbled with ropes. Before I knew it, he had me in his arms and was kissing me. I suppose I fainted. When I began to see things again, we were in that little temporary waiting-room, and my head was on his shoulder. I looked at him through a mist . . . and every minute of last summer rolled over me. It was a flood from a sewer. They say you review your life when you are about to die. You don't need any hell after that."

When the tumultuous beating of her heart subsided a little, she went on:

"He wanted to call a taxicab and take me to a hotel. I didn't get his meaning at first. When I did—life came back to me. I suppose the people around us thought we were a married couple, having our first public quarrel. Once he looked at me with a leer and said: 'So you were mistaken about what you told me, the first of September—or else you took my advice.' I told him I was mistaken about a good many things, last summer. Then he said he had gone to the studio to look me up, after his sister wrote him that I was studying

music in New York, and the secretary said there was no one enrolled there by the name of Trench. He chuckled and said I was a smart kid, and he had half a mind to take me with him to Rio."

"Rio?"

"Yes. He hasn't been at Pratt Institute at all. He flunked his entrance exams. He didn't let his people know, but has been taking all the money they'd sent him. Has a position in a Brazilian importing house, and has been studying Portugese all winter. They are sending him down there in an important place—and he hopes he'll never see this ratty old country again. He even said he'd marry me, if . . ."

"And there was no return of the old ardour?"

"No, Judith, only a sick disgust."

II

They were still talking when Larimore came home, surprised and a shade annoyed when he found that Eileen was there. He had but two tickets, and he wanted to be alone with his wife.

"Don't tell him," the girl whispered when he left the room to dress for dinner. "He is just beginning to respect me a little. I so want his—respect."

When dinner was over she went to her room. No, she was not ill. She only wanted to be alone. If Lary had planned an evening at the theatre, thinking that she would spend the night at Rye, there was no reason for a change in his plans. She was glad they were going out, so that she might be alone. She knew the meaning of *hypsos*, now that she had made the descent, within the brief space of an hour, from that height to *bathos*, the lowest depth of sordid physical reality. She wanted to

play again the winged notes that had carried her beyond the farthest reach of her own being—to purge her soul of the earth-taint that was in her.

“You are perfectly sure you are all right?” Judith asked when she told her good-night. “You won’t brood or cry?”

“No, I am past all that. When you strike bottom—there isn’t any farther to go.”

III

After the play there was a little supper, and then the long ride in the taxicab. It was nearing two o’clock when Judith looked into Eileen’s room. The bed was empty. In swift alarm she turned, to catch a faint cry from the bathroom.

“I came in here to get some hot water—and—I couldn’t get back,” the girl groaned, striving to make light of a desperate situation.

“Oh, it was heartless of me to leave you alone, at such a time.”

“Not at all. I’ve had a wonderful evening. I took my violin . . . and we worked it out together. I went to bed and slept like a rock until—oh, oh!”

“Lary!” Judith cried in fright, “telephone for a doctor. Eileen is dreadfully ill.” The tortured girl had striven to rise, but fell back convulsed on the rug.

When Larimore had carried her to her bed, he said huskily:

“Only this evening, when we were going out, I was thinking how fortunate it was to have a doctor here in the apartment. He came up in the elevator with us. He may not care to take this kind of case, but—”

“Lary, you must be mistaken. It’s not to be for almost two months. And if you were right—wouldn’t it

be over by this time? She's been suffering two hours."

"The first one is often premature. Eileen is a highly emotional nature. And I suspected at dinner that something was wrong. As to the duration—no one can gauge that. I was with my mother for three hours before Theodora was born. My father was out of town, and mamma wouldn't have Sylvia around. Bob had been sent for the nurse, and there was nothing to do but wait. Dr. Schubert knew my mother's habits. He said there was no hurry." They had reached the outer door of the apartment, his hand on the knob. "In those three hours, Judith, I was transformed from a sentimental boy to a morbid, cynical man. Syd has tried to change my viewpoint; but all his reasoning is empty. He will never be called upon to bear children."

A few minutes later he returned with the physician, in bathrobe and slippers. It was almost morning before a nurse arrived; but one of the maids was herself a mother, and intelligent help was not wanting. After an hour Lary led his wife from the room.

"Sweetheart, you can't help her, and you are enduring every pang she suffers. Her pain is mostly physical now. Yours is both physical and mental. You must not squander your strength. We will need it for the harder part to come. Won't you lie down and try to sleep?"

"Sleep! when the most terribly significant thing in the world is under way? How can we grow so callous? I never realized the marvel of life until now. I must go through every heart-throb of it. I need it! I will have more pity for your mother, more toleration for my own mother, more love for you, Lary—if there is any more."

Larimore Trench closed his eyes, bitter self-abasement surging through his being. He had never been at grips with life. Nay, rather, he had turned from it in a

superior attitude of disdain. He would not touch the woman he loved. She was too holy for his coward's hands.

IV

As the grey dawn was breaking over the snow-whitened Hudson, the nurse aroused the two who dozed in their chairs in the livingroom.

"You'd better come," she said excitedly. "Mrs. Winthrop isn't going to hold out."

At the door the physician waved them back. Judith caught a glimpse of Eileen's deathlike face and she ran sobbing down the hall. A long time she stood, her husband's cherishing arms around her. Then a petulant wail from the room at the end of the long hall told them it was over.

At noon a letter to David was posted.

"You must be prepared for the worst. Early this morning a little girl came. It weighs less than four pounds. The doctor says, considering its premature condition, the extreme youth of the mother, and the circumstances of delivery, there is not one chance in ten that it will survive. We are more concerned for the mother. I will telegraph you, only in case of extremity."

V

Laura Ramsay had come, in response to a long-distance call, and she and Judith stood beside the nurse when, after twelve hours of earth-life, the unformed morsel of humanity gave up the struggle.

It was not until the following morning that they told Eileen her baby had died. Lary was with them. He had looked for a passionate outburst. He could not fathom her mood as she lay, quite tranquil, on her pillow, a smile gathering radiance in her deepset eyes.

"It's the only way," she said at length. "I'm glad it won't have to face life—with such a handicap. It's better for all of us."

Lary stooped and kissed her. He wondered why women were so much stronger than men, why, in most of life's crises, they must bear the shock.

Satan. That's the only way I could square things with my religious training. I don't believe, now, that she will ever be punished. That shows that it was God and not the devil that did it. I'm willing to admit that I was mistaken, if you'll show me how to find happiness."

"It isn't a recipe, like the ingredients for a cake. And you must remember that I didn't prescribe the remedy, in Eileen's case. I only nursed her, after she had taken it. I haven't the faintest idea why you are unhappy."

"And I would have to tell you the whole story?"

"I wouldn't pry into your heart. I would do anything in my power to give you peace. You are Lary's mother. I have never overlooked my obligation to you."

III

Lavinia took from the words an implication more humiliating than her daughter-in-law had intended. But this was no time for recrimination. She must hold on to herself. The canker in her heart had eaten so deep that help must come, or she would go mad. Mechanically she reached for the volume on the table. Her mind went back to those first years in Springdale, when she had conned Browning in an effort to shine in Mrs. Henderson's club. Was it indeed for this that she had memorized poems, delved in abstruse literary criticism—that she might win Mrs. Henderson's approbation? One half of her knew that it was not, while the other half as stoutly denied an ulterior motive for this, or for any other deliberate act of her life.

While she was giving the attic its annual overhauling, she had come upon the yellow files of the Bromfield Sentinel, the edges broken like pie crust. She had read again the spirited account of the meeting at which Mrs. David Trench was elected secretary of the most intellect-

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ual club in Springdale. Who was there in her girlhood home for whom this triumph would provide a thrill of gratification or a sting of envy? Ellen knew all about it. Isabel had long since removed to California. Her mother was dead. The girls of her social circle? The Browning craze had not invaded Bromfield, and there was not one among her old friends for whose opinion she cared a straw.

IV

She came back to herself with a start. "The Statue and the Bust," she muttered. "We did that one, the winter before Isabel was born. I had to drop out—and Mrs. Henderson sent me her notes. It was a shockingly immoral thing, for the wife of a college president—a Presbyterian minister, at that. I never had quite the same opinion of her, after I read those notes. She said the lady who sat at the window and watched for the duke to ride by—would have been less wicked if she had actually run away with him. She said it was just as bad to want to commit sin as to actually commit it—"

"Yes, if they restrained themselves only because of fear of the consequences. There is no virtue in that kind of repression."

To Lavinia Trench everything was personal. She turned the thought over in her mind . . . "afraid of the consequences" . . . "no virtue in that kind of repression." Her whole life had been one of repression. Mrs. Henderson had stressed the lines:

"And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost
Is the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
Though the end in sight was a vice, I say."

"That isn't my idea of sin. At least it wasn't, un-

til. . . ." She trailed off into incoherence, thumbing the pages nervously. "Judith, do you think a woman—a married woman—could go on caring for some other man—" She struggled with the obstruction in her throat. "I mean the bride of Riccardi, in the poem. I can't see how caring, and just thinking how much she would like to be with him—was—wrong. She didn't commit any act of sin—didn't break the seventh commandment."

"In the eyes of the world she was a virtuous woman. In her own heart she was an unsatisfied wanton. She added hypocrisy to the sin of desire, and on that hypocrisy she wrecked her only chance for happiness."

V

Once before, Judith had attempted to implant an abstract idea in Mrs. Trench's mind. Now she was betrayed into a discussion of moral responsibility, with no intent other than that of bridging over a trying period of her none too comfortable relations with her mother-in-law. That Lavinia would carry away even a germ of an idea, she did not suspect. She had merely reiterated what Mrs. Henderson had said, twenty years ago. As yet she had not fully perceived, in that warped mind, one dominating characteristic: the ability to find justification for anything that seemed desirable. True, Eileen had said—but Eileen was not always fair in her old-time strictures on her mother.

Judith looked at the abject figure, the pallid face and the hard mouth . . . and pity overmastered her. She wanted to say something comforting. The door was shut, the discussion ended. Lavinia sat there, pondering. It was all so different from the groundwork of her religious training. Probably Browning and Judith and

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Mrs. Henderson were wrong. To her literal mind, their idea could not accord with the stern dictum: "The wages of sin is death." Still, their theory would serve to explain Eileen. In her pondering, she went the length of formulating the postulate: "Eileen sinned and became happy. Her sin was the source of her regeneration."

There must be something to it. She, Vine Larimore, had been virtuous—and disaster had overtaken her. Lettie Fournier had sinned . . . and for all the years of her subsequent life she had worn the name of Calvin Stone. That this distinction brought her rival scant happiness, was beside the point. The transgression of the moral law was the barrier which both Lettie and Eileen had passed to the kind of satisfaction that had been denied her. Judith had not told her of the days and nights of self-purging. She saw only externals, and these were all in favour of the Browning theory. After a long interval she said:

"Would you mind telling her—Eileen—that I want her to come to me? You know better how to get hold of her. She thinks I don't love her—that I'm partial to Sylvia. I do love her . . . and I want her at home with me, where I can study her. It will be bitter enough dose for me to take my lesson from her. But I am willing to do it, if she can show me the way to happiness." She looked incredibly old and tired and hopeless. "And would you mind lending me your copy of Browning? I want to read 'The Statue and the Bust' through. Sylvia took mine with her when she moved to Detroit. I didn't think I would ever look at it again."

XXXIV Lavinia's Credo

I

"Sister Judy," Jack Denslow called, "there's a bully fire down the avenue. Come and watch the motor engine go by. Good-bye, old horse, your day is done."

Judith Trench crossed to the window and stood beside her young brother; but her mind was not on the marvel of metal and speed that had gone from sight almost before its clanging bell-note reached her ears. Another fifth of March. A year ago . . . Eileen . . . there, in that very room. And now . . . Did Eileen remember? Did any of the family remember? She and Lary had spent the winter in New York, going to Springdale only when business demanded, and each brief visit brought its fresh surprise.

With the Marksley contract off his hands, David improved in health so rapidly that he had long since ceased to be a source of anxiety. Eileen and her mother had effected an *entente cordiale* which apparently worked well for both. The woman who had wrought the bridge, however frail and inadequate, over which mother and daughter might pass to an understanding hitherto unknown in their association, reflected with grave misgivings that the bridge was not the end of the journey.

Once she was on the point of telling Lary about his mother, their sharp dispute and the subsequent ethical discussion. The change in Lavinia, since that day, was so marked that the neighbours made comment. The woman who had spent her mature years surging from offi-

cious sweetness to the most violent outbursts of temper, went about in a state of tranquil meditation that could not be accounted for by anything external to herself. There was none of the rapturous devotion to David that had characterized her return from Bromfield; but at least she was not unkind. Of all those who watched her, only Judith could surmise what was going on in her mind. Might it be that Lavinia had achieved her Indian Summer without the killing frost? Had there, perhaps, been a revision of her *credo* from the simple tenets of the catechism to the complex philosophy of Robert Browning? Judith shivered as she faced the thought and its possible consequences.

She had told the troubled woman that sin consisted, not in action, but in desire. Could Lavinia, literal-minded and creed-ridden, handle a concept so foreign to her convictions? Had Lary's mother torn away the solid foundation of her existence, and was she building again—a substructure that would sustain her through the barren years to come? Could this be done, at Lavinia's age and with the rigid material of Lavinia's soul? Would the house of her being come crashing down, when she sought to shift from what she had been to what she hoped to be?

Judith was glad when Lary told her, that evening, that he must return to Springdale. Her mother-in-law might seek counsel of her, in the privacy of the library where their two natures had clashed again and yet again. All the tedious journey to the West, she turned over in her mind a working corollary to that elusive proposition, the nature of sin. How tenuous, how like shifting sand, the thought-mass on which our concrete actions must rest! Had she any assurance that her conception of duty, of principle, of right-thinking, was better for humanity than the set of fatuous concepts she had sought to displace?

II

If Lavinia had need of help, she gave no token. She was at the station to meet them, and she was bursting with a secret. There had been no mention of it in her letters, because one could not be sure about such things—and telling them in advance was likely to spoil the charm. Then she sealed her lips until they were well within the discreet walls of Vine Cottage.

"Of course I may be mistaken; but unless I miss my guess, there's going to be a wedding before you go back to New York."

"A wedding? Some one I have met?"

"There! I was sure you didn't suspect. Though how you could have helped it—the way Syd acted, when you were here the end of January—"

"Dear old Syd! I hope he has fallen in love wisely. It would go hard with him if he should blunder."

"I'm sure it will be all right. The difference in age doesn't matter—and you know he will make her a noble husband. If only she doesn't get some foolish notion of telling him all that wretched affair. I tried to caution her, in a roundabout way; but you know how stubborn Eileen is."

"Eileen!" Judith dropped a handful of toilet articles on the dressing table and sat down, weakly.

"Mercy, Judith!" The woman's tone carried positive contempt for such obtuseness. "He was with her every evening while you and Larimore were here, the last time. Of course they were reading Latin together, or working with the violin. But I knew what it would lead to. And it was my making her come home, after she'd been at their house three evenings a week, that did it. He missed her so dreadfully that he got over thinking about

her as a little girl. Goodness knows, she's more mature than Sylvia was at twenty—and Syd will always be a boy."

"Has she told you?"

"No, but I wouldn't look for her to do that. She's been very nice to me. Oh, Judith, I hope she will tell you it's true."

"I'm sure it would be a great comfort to you to have her happily married."

"Yes—but I wasn't thinking so much about that part of it. I had my own case in mind. It would be the last straw of evidence—that all my old ideas were wrong. For the first time in my life, I want to be sure I was in the wrong."

Her eyes glittered and her slender form seemed to dilate. She was not thinking of her cruelty to Eileen and her subsequent reluctance to admit that in her daughter's case good might grow out of evil. Eileen was become, in her mother's eyes, a manikin, to be posed this way and that for the studying of effects—an architect's drawing, to serve as a pattern for the rebuilding of her mother's life.

III

Later in the day the girl came, her face wearing an expression of deadly earnest. Already Mrs. Trench's hope was transformed into certainty. Judith led the way to the little boudoir Lary had fitted for her on the second floor.

"Now, dear, what is it?" she asked when the door was shut.

"The most important trouble I ever had. I ought to have written you—when Syd first asked me. But I did so want to tell papa first . . . before even you. I owe

him that, for all the pain I caused him. Syd wants to be married on my eighteenth birthday, and that's less than three weeks off."

"And you love him, Eileen?"

"As I never thought it would be possible to love. We just belong together—like you and Lary, only, oh, so different. I can see it in a hundred ways. When I don't get what he's trying to tell me—abstract ideas, you know—he goes up to the landing in the reception hall and sits down at his mother's pipe organ and puts the thought into something that I can get hold of. When a man can talk to you that way—and music is the only language you really do understand—there is only one answer. If I'm in an ugly mood, he doesn't scold or upbraid me. He works out a theme in A-minor. I try to run away from it, and I can't. I've made bold to go past him, up to my room, and my feet wouldn't carry me up the stairs."

"And then, Eileen?"

"I cry it out on his shoulder. After I have washed the meanness out, we can talk sense. I don't mind in the least—that he's always right."

"And there's one point on which you can't come to an agreement?"

"Yes, only one. Judith, how far is it necessary to go with confession of something that you know will lose you the respect and affection of—"

"Oh, Eileen, my poor little sister!"

"Don't let it hurt you," the girl cried, her eyes filling. "If life isn't so perfect, I can stand it. There is one thing more important than the man you love—and that is your conviction of what is square and honest. Syd can tell me what to do in other matters—but this is in your line, not his."

"Dearest, it seems to me that there can be no sure foot-

hold in marriage if a wife conceals from her husband an experience as important as that. I know what a humiliation it is to open such a secret chamber. I did it, Eileen."

"Judith, you don't think I—" She stared, aghast. "You couldn't think me capable of taking Sydney Schubert's love—a man as clean and honourable as he is—without telling him why I went to New York?"

"Then he knows?"

"He knew . . . all along." Her fair cheeks flamed. "When he told me he cared, I said there was a reason why I couldn't ever marry any decent man. Judith, he put his two arms around me and looked me square in the eyes, and said: 'You were a poor little wilful child, and you didn't know that fire would burn. Any woman, my dear, is good enough for any man—if she is honest.' The only thing he wanted to know was . . . what we had done with it. He said that would make a difference. He was relieved when I told him. And he thinks you were made in heaven—to have saved me—for him."

"But if you have told him, and he is satisfied—what is the obstacle?"

"It is his father. I can't marry Syd and go there to live, letting Papa Schubert believe I am the pure white flower he thinks me. Syd says he won't have his father's ideal of me shattered—because his father wouldn't look at it the way he does. He might forgive me: but I'd always be tarnished, to him."

"Do you remember, Eileen, the day you told the truth to Laura Ramsay? You began by saying you were under no moral obligation to her mother. I don't know how we can draw those lines of distinction; but I feel them with absolute certainty. You are under no need to confess your secret to Sylvia or Theodora—and for widely

different reasons. Indeed we must go to any length to prevent Theo ever learning the truth. With Dr. Schubert it is the same. It would only give him useless pain."

"That's what Syd said. He led me over to that little peachblow vase—the one that was bequeathed to his father by one of his grateful patients. He told me the satin glaze and the peachbloom tints were the result of the heat in the kiln, that almost destroyed the body of the vase. He asked me if I would be willing to break that little amphora, that his father loves, just to prove to him that it isn't as perfect on the inside as it looks to him. He might patch the fragments together, but he would always be conscious of the cracks."

"Syd is right. It would be brutality—sheer vandalism."

"You precious treasure. He told me that was what you would say. Now I am going to the office to tell my darling daddy that he is to have a *real* son-in-law."

"When are you going to tell your mother, dear?"

"That's Syd's job. He is going to make formal application for my hand. He can get off a thing like that, without batting an eye, when he's just dying to get out and yell. And the worst of it is, mamma'll take it in dead earnest. I suppose Sylvia will have sarcastic things to say. I don't care. Syd never was really in love with her—after he was old enough to cut his eye teeth."

IV

Mrs. Penrose did not come home for the wedding. Just what she wrote her mother, the other members of the family never knew. Her letter came with another, which bore the Bromfield postmark, and the two were on Lavinia's plate when she came down to breakfast. David and the girls were already at the table, and Theo

had inspected the mail. Drusilla had been instructed not to take letters from the box, and the sight of two thick envelopes threw Lavinia into a nervous chill. She picked them up and carried them to the sun room, saying she had a headache and would eat nothing.

After a little, David followed her, distressed. "Is there anything wrong in Bromfield—at your brother's house, or with my people?"

"There's nothing the matter in Bromfield. Sylvia is a cat!"

XXXV The Credo at Work

I

When school closed in June, Judith took Theodora for the long promised visit to New York. Sydney and Eileen were off for a belated honeymoon in the mountains of Colorado, and Lavinia Trench reflected that the coveted privacy had come at the crucial moment. She would be alone to think things out. David was away from home much of the time, and when he was in the house his wife was only mechanically conscious of his presence. She viewed the neighbours as through a mist. Orders were given to Drusilla, with the monotonous intonation of a talking machine. That the orders were rational was evidence of the complete detachment that could enable her mind to function without conscious effort. It was as if she had wound up the machinery of her being and had withdrawn, leaving it to the old familiar routine.

After three weeks, her cloistered retreat was invaded by the most disturbing member of her family. The passionate devotion that had centered in her youngest-born—to her purblind vision the most perfect copy of herself—had undergone insidious change, as she centered her interest in Eileen. Theodora was irritating beyond endurance. With the child in the house, there could be no peace. Reluctantly, almost bitterly, she came back to the dull reality of life. David was still in Jacksonville from Monday to Saturday. After a day or two,

she consented to let Theo stay with Dr. Schubert and Nanny. To her daughter-in-law she confessed that it was not because the old doctor was so lonely, but that she could not endure the child's incessant chatter. The dropping of a fork behind her chair would send her into a paroxysm of shaking—Lavinia, who had always laughed at nervous women.

II

One morning Judith stood with her husband at an upper window, watching the agitated woman as she paced up and down before the house. The postman was late.

"She watched for him just that way yesterday, Lary. And when he failed to bring what she was expecting, her disappointment was pitiful."

"My mother is going through some deep transition. I wish I could help her; but she has always shut me out. She is a hundred times more frank and confidential with you than she has ever been with me or with her own daughters. Do you think, dear, you could induce her to tell you what is troubling her?"

"I have tried. She talks freely about the emptiness and misery of her life. She is gnawingly unsatisfied; but she gives no clue. Such devotion as your father's ought to have won her, years ago. I spoke rather plainly to her about it. I knew it would anger her; but I wanted to shock her into some line of rational thinking. The mention of her husband's tenderness only infuriated her. She said such cruel things about him. And, Lary, he is as much in the dark as we are. He talked to me about it, Sunday night. Is it possible. . . ."

"What, dear?"

"I wondered if there might be something in her life—

long ago—a scar that is still sensitive—some shock that left a buried impression.”

“A lover, you mean? I hardly think so. She has always teased or brutally insulted my father with the mention of an old sweetheart of hers. It seems, they were deadly rivals, and papa won her because of his clean morals. The other man was the rakish sort—and in a town like Bromfield—with my mother’s prejudices and the thing that in her case passes for religious conviction. . . .”

Just then the postman rounded the corner. There was only one letter for the Trench household, but its effect was electrical. Lavinia took it from his hand and ran stumbling into the house. At the sill she dropped to her knees, regained her footing and hurried inside. She had not opened the envelope, hence its contents could not account for her perturbed state of mind. It came to Judith . . . that the whole future hung on the tenor of a reply.

III

At noon she appeared in the dining-room of Vine Cottage. Her cheeks were pasty, ashen, but her eyes burned with insane luster. She must send an important letter to Sylvia, and it was too late— She floundered, catching a chair for support. Would Larimore send the office boy out with a special delivery stamp?

“I’ll take your letter with me, and post it at the office,” Lary said, annoyed by the crafty manner that marked his mother’s too frequent subterfuges.

“I haven’t written it yet. It isn’t the kind I could dash off in a minute. Sylvia wants me to be in Detroit by Friday noon. I’ll have to get word—”

“Papa won’t be home until Saturday evening,” her son

said sharply. "You can't go off without consulting him."

The word "consulting" was unfortunate. It released a flood of martyrdom. Lavinia thought she owed a duty to her daughter that must outweigh any consideration or demand on the part of her husband.

"Let me see my sister's letter. If there is anything serious, I can telephone."

"I didn't bring it with me. In fact, I accidentally dropped it in the grate and it was burned before I could get it out."

"A grate fire in July?"

"I was burning some scraps—and it got mixed with them."

"You are not going away until papa comes home. It isn't fair to him—and if you insist—I shall call Sylvia by long distance."

Judith averted her eyes. The sight of her mother-in-law's baffled fury was more than she could endure. In the end the woman agreed to defer her trip until Saturday night. She would write Sylvia that she could not be spared from home.

IV

Early Friday morning she came with another request. She had a letter from her husband which she handed to Lary, ostentatiously. David was entirely willing that she should go to Detroit. In fact, he had promised Sylvia that they together would visit her as soon as the house-cleaning and redecorating of the apartment was over. He would have earned a vacation when the Jacksonville contract was finished.

"Now, Larimore, if you will look after the ticket—and the sleeper berth—I'll only take a suit case, and your father can bring what I need in his trunk. By that time,

I'll know about the weather, and what kind of clothes I need. I want the ticket via Chicago. It's so much shorter than the other route."

"Chicago?" Something feline, insinuating, in her tone arrested him. "There's no direct route from Springdale to Detroit via Chicago. You would have to go to Littlefield and wait there for the St. Louis train—and in Chicago it would mean going from one station to the other. The last time you tried that, you got lost, and missed your connection."

"But I must—that is, I'd prefer to go that way. It wouldn't matter if I did miss my train. Sylvia wants me to do some shopping for her."

"Shopping on Sunday, mamma?"

As the woman hurried from her son's presence, Judith heard her mutter: "There's more than one way to kill a cat."

V

Saturday was consumed with the endless little things that went to the preparation for a journey. At noon Lavinia sent Dutton out to post a letter to Sylvia. It was plastered over the upper third with a combination of pink and green stamps. Lavinia Trench abhorred that sort of thing; but she would not ask Larimore for a proper stamp to insure Sunday delivery of her letter. She shunned him with an animosity that was not to be misinterpreted. He had angered her profoundly. She told Judith that she would go to the station in Hafferty's cab and wait there until David came in. In such a case he would not mind sitting with her until her train arrived. She had evidently asked too many favours of her son. She had always supposed that sons were glad to serve their mothers.

Judith sought to analyse the woman's torn state of mind. Did she always get into such a fever when she was going away from home? Lavinia had travelled much, in spite of her oft repeated assertion that she never went anywhere, never had any pleasure . . . nothing but the dull drudgery of a wife and mother. Before her visit to Bromfield she had been in just such a mental state. But was it, exactly, this condition of mind? Two years ago, everything that Lavinia did—every subterfuge, every veiled speech or cruel innuendo—was carefully thought out. It all had a direct bearing on the main object. She must go to Bromfield, and she would not admit to her family—nor indeed to herself—that she had need to go. From infancy she had been devious, approaching her goal by the most tortuous path. She was this way in her housekeeping. One could not be a martyr if things were easy. The simple, natural way was hateful to her—the refuge of lazy wives.

This much Judith had set down, in her effort to understand her mother-in-law's curiously warped psychology. But now there was a new phase. The episode of Sylvia's letter, accidentally burned in the grate on a steaming July day, sufficed to betray a significant breaking-up of the tough fibre of an irrational but tremendously efficient mind. The mycelium of decay—some deadly fungus—had penetrated the heartwood of Lavinia Trench's being. She went into a panic at the slightest turn in her plans. She no longer counted upon the unforeseen contingency, or guarded against it. That that crashing letter—the occasion for this hurried trip to Detroit—was not from Sylvia, Judith was morally certain. From whom, then? She laid the perplexity wearily aside. With one unknown quantity, she might have solved the equation. Here were two unknown and unknowable

quantities, since Lavinia—after her two disastrous blunders—refused to talk except in monosyllables.

VI

When the suit case was in process of preparation, Judith invaded Mrs. Trench's bedroom. She brought a dark negligée for the Pullman, in place of the delicate one that Sylvia had ridiculed, two years ago. As she offered it, her mother-in-law turned furtively to conceal something she was in the act of securing in the bottom of her small travelling bag. Her fingers caught at the edge of a night-dress, awkwardly, and the thing was revealed . . . the borrowed volume of Browning.

XXXVI Consummation

I

A brief, unsatisfactory letter came Monday noon, while David was having luncheon at Vine Cottage. It was written on Pullman paper, in a loose scrawl. The train was four hours late, and of course there was no one at the station to meet her. But then, she had not expected to be met. Everything would be all right, she was sure. It was frightfully hot in Detroit. She would not write again until Tuesday evening, since she and Sylvia would be up to the ears in housecleaning.

"I can't, somehow, feel that things are right," David said, returning the envelope to his pocket and drawing out another. "Vine acted so strange while we were waiting in the station. I thought I ought to go along to take care of her—but this work in the office is so pressing—and I'm just compelled to go to Jacksonville for part of the week. I told her, if she needed me. . . ." He halted, his eyes receding. "She flared out at me so fiercely that I didn't say another word. That's where I ought to have been firm. But I never could understand your mother, Lary."

"None of us does, papa. What is the other letter?"

"It's from Sylvia. I found it at the office." Larimore read aloud:

"Dear Papa:

"I'm writing in a hurry, so that you can do me a favour. Mamma's special has just arrived, saying she can't reach Detroit until Tuesday noon—that you and Lary have upset all her plans,

Well, now, please, *please*, PLEASE upset them some more. Not that I don't want her to visit me; but it is terribly inconvenient now. The place is torn up with painters and paper-hangers. The weather is a fright—and Oliver cross as a bear. Mamma says she must be here to help me. But you know how I hate to have her around when I have anything important to do. If you can induce her to wait a week—really, I'm afraid Oliver won't be civil to her, in his present mood—you'll do her and us a big service.

"Your affectionate Daughter,
SYLVIA."

II

Four days of agonized suspense, during which—at Lary's urgent request—David abstained from replying to either of the letters . . . and Lavinia Trench came home. She walked into the house, a tottering old woman. Theo and her father were in the dining-room, trying to choke down Drusilla's tempting dinner, and they started from the table as if an apparition from the dead had confronted them. She was dusty and disheveled. The close travelling hat hung limp over one eye, and through the greenish-gray of her cheeks the bones were modelled remorselessly.

"What—what has happened to you, Vine? Have you been in a wreck?"

"A wreck? Oh, yes, a wreck. Everything is a wreck."

She sank into a chair and sat staring at the floor. After a moment she collected herself to ask: "Has Sylvia written?" And then: "*What* has Sylvia written?"

"Nothing—except the letter she sent before you got there. She wanted you to wait until she was through with her housecleaning—"

"I know all about that! David Trench, if you ever speak to that unprincipled girl, I'll" Lavinia

glared, her heart pounding visibly. "She . . . I might have known what to expect, after the letter she wrote when Syd and Eileen were married. She's worse than Eileen, a hundred times worse. She's capable—of lying—about her own mother. She'll try to lie out of this thing. You can't depend on a word she says. And Oliver's as unprincipled as she is."

In times of stress it had always been a source of relief to Lavinia to talk—to abuse some one. More often than not, David was the victim. Now she was hardly conscious of his presence. Theodora she did not see at all. She was sunk in the morass of her own misery, a misery so devastating that her worst enemy must have pitied her.

"Was Sylvia unkind to you?"

"Unkind? I like the way you pick your words!"

"I'm so sorry, Vine. You must make allowances for the hot weather—and Oliver's uncertain temper. Sylvia had enough to upset her."

"That's no excuse for treating her mother in such a shameful way."

She went up to her room and shut herself in. From behind a curtain she watched while David went to the cottage to consult his son. There was no train arriving from Detroit at that hour of the day. It later developed that Lavinia had left the train at Littlefield, and that her travel-stained appearance was the result of a rough ride in a service car. David had often come home that way, when he had contracts in Pana and Sullivan. He knew, too, that it was the Chicago train; but the fact was without significance for him.

When the woman had calmed herself somewhat, she told a more or less coherent story. She had foolishly tried to surprise Sylvia—had pictured her daughter's de-

light, when she should walk in, unannounced, on the heels of the letter that deferred her coming until Tuesday. She went to the apartment in a cab and rang the bell. There was no one at home. She returned to the station and wrote the letter to David—she would not have told him for the world that she was greeted by locked doors.

"Why didn't you go right to the janitor, my dear?" David asked, tenderly. "You know Oliver and Sylvia often go out on the lake, Sundays, when it's hot. And—it just occurs to me—are you sure you went to the right place?"

Judith, watching the unfoldment of the story from a vantage point that was not David's, thought the woman clutched eagerly at a plank she had hitherto not seen. She gained a precious interval of thought, while her lips retorted:

"I should think I ought to know Sylvia's address."

"Yes, but those great apartment houses all look alike. You might not even have been on the right street. You know, once when you went to St. Louis—"

"Yes, but that time I took the wrong car line. It was the fault of the policeman who directed me. I'd think a cabman would know the streets."

"What did Sylvia say—when you finally—"

"What did she say? She didn't say anything. She wouldn't let me in. I tried to telephone her from the hotel, Monday morning—and I'm morally certain it was Oliver who answered the 'phone. When I said it was mother, he said I had the wrong number, and hung up. I tried again, and they wouldn't answer."

"But when you went back to the house—"

"I went three times—and once I know I saw Sylvia peeping through the curtain at the apartment door. She didn't want me there, and she wouldn't let me in."

"I'm going to call Sylvia up and ask her what she means by—"

Lavinia leaped across the room and fell upon her husband, forcing him roughly into his chair.

"You'll do nothing of the sort. Haven't I been humiliated enough already?"

III

They were interrupted by the clanging of bells, on Sherman avenue. Judith went to the window, to report that a cloud of smoke was visible against the western sky. A moment later, Dutton called from the lawn that the Marksley house was burning. Theodora wanted to see the fun. He would drive her out, if her father and brother were willing. They were not willing!

Dutton's disappointment was greater than Theo's, albeit she would have revelled in the sight of that one particular fire. Dutton could not make out why people kept a car, if they were too stingy to use it. Nothing ever happened in Springdale, and when there was a little excitement, a fellow wasn't allowed to enjoy it.

But the spectacle would hardly have been worth the exertion of cranking the car. The Monday paper gave a graphic account of the blaze that started in the store room on the top floor, and was extinguished before it had accomplished more than partial destruction of the roof. The damage was amply covered by insurance. It was understood that Mr. David Trench would investigate the loss, and make necessary repairs, at the instance of the insurance company.

XXXVII In the "Personal" Column

I

Early Thursday morning, David was on the point of going out to the Marksley Addition to estimate the fire loss, when he stopped at sight of Judith, entering her own gate. He crossed the parched grass of the wide lawn and joined her. Once before he had hinted that his wife's mind might be failing—that the shock of Eileen's tragedy and the consequent relief of her propitious marriage might have unsettled her mother's reason. He had talked to Dr. Schubert about it, but had elicited no sympathy for his theory. The physician did not believe for a moment that Sylvia—in spite of the evidential letter to her father—had refused to open the door or to answer the telephone. Sylvia was entirely absorbed in herself, but she was not a fool. He was rather taken with the belief that Lavinia had been playing some sort of prank on her family. A born play-actor, she grew weary of the burden of actuality, and sought relief—excitement—in a world of make-believe. This time she had miscalculated, and found things hard to explain.

"He said one thing that went against the grain, Judith, even from Dr. Schubert. He said that when we make a lifelong practice of petty deception, we don't gain the facility we gain by any other constant exercise; but instead, we grow reckless, until we are unable to know truth from falsehood. Then we overreach ourselves. I accept the fact—but I don't like to think that Vine would deliberately—lie to me. She doesn't always see

things in their true relations. But that she would make up a lie . . . I can't believe that."

"Certainly you can't, father."

Through the sheer curtains of her bedroom window Lavinia watched them—Lavinia who through five days of shifting from one detail to another had maintained the mystery of her fruitless visit. What were they saying? She strained her keen ears, to catch only a muffled note of solicitude. Now the postman loomed in sight. The ubiquitous postman! If he had not delivered that letter. . . . In her rage, she began to abuse the postman for her wretchedness, the collapse of her iridescent bubble of happiness. He was putting into David's hand some letters and a paper, the Bromfield Sentinel. She had forgotten that this was Thursday. She saw her husband open the crude little sheet and glance at the Personal Column, where he so often found news of a friend he had not seen since his wedding day. A long agony of waiting . . . and David thrust the paper into Judith's hand and walked rapidly away, a strange look on his transparent face.

II

What had he seen in the column of village gossip? Lavinia was conscious that a hornets' nest had been rent asunder, above her head. A hundred furious possibilities buzzed in her ears. Stumbling in wild agitation to the deep closet of her room, she took a leather-bound volume from her Gladstone, where it had lain since her return from Detroit. Without opening it, she fled in a panic to Vine Cottage—burst into the breakfast-room, with a fine show of indignation, and flung the book on the table.

"There! I'm done with that thing. Browning's a fool!"

"I'm sorry you have found him unprofitable. He isn't easy reading."

"I have as much sense as you or Mrs. Henderson. You made me believe he told the truth. I hate a liar. I never told a lie in my life."

"I didn't ask you to take the volume," Judith said pointedly.

"No, but you made me believe there was something in it—something that was an improvement on the Bible. . . ."

Her daughter-in-law took up the offender and carried it to the library. When she returned, there was a precipitate relapse into a chair. Lavinia had improved the interval to look for the Sentinel. It was not in the room. A bitter tirade poured from her purple lips. There was no use in people trying to shirk responsibility. David had always done it. So had Larimore. They continually placed her in untenable situations and then left her to bear the consequences alone. She had had to rear the family single-handed, to take all the responsibility for their moral and financial welfare. If it had not been for her, they might have been criminals or tramps. David had never concerned himself for her . . . or them.

"Mother, I can't listen to such outrageous injustice. I have never seen a more considerate husband than father is to you. Even Lary, with all his tenderness, and his perfect comradeship, has his eyes on himself most of the time. Father never thinks of himself. His whole heart is given to you and his children."

"Yes, and he hangs over me until he drives me to distraction. I'll tell him where I have been—if he doesn't stop following me about—as if I hadn't a right to go where I please."

III

Lavinia's usual solvent, a flood of tears, failed her. Dry-eyed she left the room, forgetting to ask for the paper, which had been the real object of her call. Judith returned to the library and took down the volume of Browning. In some unfathomable way it was responsible for the distressing situation. As she turned the pages, pencil marks caught her eye. A line, a word or two, in some instances an entire stanza had been under-scored. They were, without exception, love passages. Well over towards the back, a sheet of note paper came to view, covered with Lavinia's tight, precise writing. If Browning *would* change the subject, just when you thought you had grasped his meaning . . . at least, you could fling your net over the elusive concept and carry it away—isolate it from the confusing wealth of context.

But no! This was more than random copying. Widely separated passages had been woven together into a kind of confession of faith . . . like lemon jelly in a mould. Judith, as she read, forgot that she was looking into another woman's soul, forgot Lavinia, in the fascination of following the curious windings of Lavinia's mind.

"Come back with me to the first of all. Let us lean and love it over again. Let us now forget and now recall, and gather what we let fall. Each life's incomplete, you see. I follow where I am led, knowing so well the leader's hand. Oh, woman, wooed, not wed! When we loved each other, lived and loved the same, till an evening came when a shaft from the devil's bow pierced to our ingle-glow, and the friends were friend and foe. Never fear but there's provision of the devils to quench knowledge, lest we walk the earth in rapture—making those who catch God's secret just so much more prize their capture. The true end, sole and single, we stop here for is this love-way with some other soul to

mingle. How is it under our control to love or not to love? Heart, shall we live or die? The rest . . . settle by and by."

Judith laid the sheet in its place and returned the volume to the bookcase. Yes, David was right. But what a weird obsession! Lavinia, out of the pregnant depths of her misery, had fashioned a lover to her liking, a phantom lover, to be communed with in secret. Had she gone to Detroit, not to visit Sylvia, but to seek some fantastic realization of her yearning for the perfect romance? Why had she come home, shattered and undone. A real man . . . the man she met in the Pullman when she was returning from Bromfield—the man who had fallen in love with her?

She paused beside the table where, an hour ago, she had laid the Bromfield paper. She looked at it with vacant eyes, striving to clarify her turbid thoughts. Gradually, out of the emptiness, words came up to her, the words that David had read, at the head of the "personal" column.

"Our distinguished citizen, Mr. Calvin Stone, has just returned from a ten days' business trip to Chicago."

The room with its delicate furnishings faded, as when the lights are suddenly turned off. Judith stared, her heart leaping in unrhythmic cadence, her eyes following the monstrous panorama that unrolled before her. Long ago she had gone to a little cinema theatre with Lary and the girls, where black dots had danced on a white screen. Black dots were dancing now, on the white screen of her memory.

A dozen disjointed fragments of conversation; an old story her grandmother had told her, of a secret wedding in Rochester; Lavinia's greedy interest in the story, in all that pertained to Calvin and Lettie Stone;

her determination to revisit Bromfield the summer following Mrs. Stone's death; the miracle of her regeneration when she returned home; the yellow pallor on her face when she put the question: "Do people ever really get over things?" The dots had woven themselves into a succession of preliminary shapes, and all at once the picture was complete. Lavinia's secret lay bare before her daughter-in-law's gaze.

IV

Outside on the street there was commotion. Judith was aroused from her torpor of pain by Lavinia Trench's voice, strident and hysterical:

"Carry him into the west room. You can't take him upstairs on that stretcher. What has happened to him? Why didn't you telephone me? David, are you alive?"

David had fallen from the roof of the Marksley house. No one knew what had caused the accident. He was standing on a wide ledge, that ought to have been secure. One of the workmen saw him stagger, reel backward and come crashing down. It was fortunate that he did not strike the stone pavement. That would have been fatal. He was apparently only stunned by the fall.

Judith followed the curious crowd into the house and bent above the stricken man, while his wife ran panting up the stairs to prepare his bed. He opened his eyes and his lips fashioned inarticulate words.

"The paper," she saw rather than heard, "the paper . . . burn it. I saw—in a flash—that blinded me—and I fell. . . ."

XXXVIII The Greater Love

I

The consulting surgeon was still upstairs with Dr. Schubert and the nurse. In the sun-room, the Venetian blinds drawn to shut out the hot July rays, the family sat, awaiting the verdict. Sydney and Eileen had hurried home from the West in response to a conservative telegram from Lary. Sylvia and her husband were already there. The meeting of the sisters was reserved, befitting the occasion. Now Sylvia forgot her father—her growing resentment because of the general misunderstanding with regard to her mother's alleged visit—as she gazed across the spacious room at the beautiful young woman whom she could with difficulty accept as Mrs. Sydney Schubert.

"I can't understand it," she whispered to Oliver. "You know what a raw, scraggy girl she was when we left here. I couldn't make out what Hal Marksley saw in her. But for Syd—he had such an eye for beauty. He never went with a girl who was plain or homely. Mamma never wrote us how she had changed."

"I told you a long time ago," her husband retorted, "that the ugly duckling had a way of growing into the swan of the family."

Sylvia flushed, annoyed, and lapsed into silence.

II

Outside the passer-by paused to look curiously at the house. David Trench hovered between life and death,

and the town forgot the summer heat in its anxious sympathy. No one had known what a great man he was, what an irreparable loss his death would mean to the community. All over the town little groups of prominent men discussed the catastrophe with hushed breathing. The labourers who had done David's bidding for years wiped furtive tears from their eyes when they were told that the case was all but hopeless.

Fifty—the meridian of life! A younger man would stand a better chance. Dr. Schubert feared a spinal lesion. Yet the shock to the nervous system might account for the torpor that had prevailed, with fleeting lucid intervals, for four days. If that were all, the human machine would right itself presently.

Early Sunday morning Mr. Marksley had come to the house to inquire about the patient, and to repudiate any responsibility for the accident . . . and had encountered Lavinia Trench's tongue in a manner that he was not likely to forget. She had another score to settle with this man and his family, unnamed but not absent from the motive power of her attack. The outburst had a salutary effect on the woman who, after the first excitement of David's home-coming, had moved with the automatism of a sleep-walker. When he had gone, she sought Judith. Larimore must go at once and arrange with Dr. Schubert for consultation, the best surgeon in St. Louis.

III

When they were alone, she fell on her daughter-in-law's neck, sobbing hysterically: "Oh, oh, oh, if he dies I shall go distracted. He doesn't dare to die . . . now. If he was going to die, why couldn't it have been sooner? Oh, my God in heaven, what am I saying? Judith, can't you

save him? Don't you know what it would mean for him to die now?"

"Try to be calm, mother. The case isn't quite desperate."

"Oh, but my case is desperate. You don't know. . . . If you could have heard him, last night! He said the most terrible thing. He must have been thinking it, or it wouldn't have slipped out like that, when his mind was wandering. When you think a thing over and over, you say it without meaning to. He took my hands and said he was only a carpenter's son . . . but Ch—rist was a carpenter's son, too . . . and it was worth carrying a cross all these years, to have me, when I belonged to another man."

"Mother! Oh, this is pitiful."

"I wanted to get down on my knees and tell him that I never belonged to any other man. I wanted to confess that I was the vilest sinner, and unworthy of his love. It wasn't me, at all. I was standing to one side, looking at David and me, and thinking what I would do if I was in Vine Larimore's place. And when I walked away, there didn't seem to be any floor under my feet."

"Mother, dear, why didn't you open your heart to him, when you were so close?"

"No, no!" she cried, beating back the suggestion with baffled hands. "You never had David look at you with condemnation. Oh, I would rather have him slap my face. I could resent that. But to have him condemn—and then forgive. . . ." She swayed weakly, all her force concentrated in the relentless mouth. "Judith, if he dies, it will be on my head. You told me that it was as bad to sin in thought as to carry out the desire. I wanted to kill David. Don't look at me like that. I have to tell you. There is no one else I can trust—and

"I'll babble it, when I don't know I'm talking, if I don't get it out of my mind."

"How do you mean, mother?"

"Twice I tried. Once when you were in Europe—when his health was so poor—and I was going to give him the wrong medicine. And six weeks ago, when he brought a lot of money home—and I thought it would look as if a burglar did it. It was just after you took Theo to New York, and we were alone in the house. At the last moment, my courage failed. But if he dies, I will be held accountable for his murder. Judith, he has to live. Don't you see. . . ."

IV

And thus it came about that the great specialist had been sent for. Already he had been up there in David's room for more than an hour. Now a door was opening, two pairs of feet were descending the stairs. Before those in the sun-room realized it, the distinguished man had passed to the waiting cab and was gone. Lavinia was on her feet, aquiver with excitement.

"Where is he going? I want to ask him a hundred questions."

"He has told me everything you need to know," the old family physician told her sternly. "He will send us another nurse from St. Louis—a young man capable of handling a dead weight. My diagnosis, unfortunately, was correct."

"Will he get well?" Lavinia's lips were blue and her eyes protruded.

"We must wait and see. He will be paralysed from the waist down."

David to sit in a wheel-chair the rest of his life! Vine staggered from the room. Her daughter-in-law

followed, fearful for one or the other of those two actors in life's sorry drama. But the stricken woman only paused an instant at her husband's door, and passed on to the performance of some commonplace duty. Judith returned to the lower hall, to hear Dr. Schubert say:

"He begged me not to let them prolong his life. Said it was wrong to hang on, when he had finished his task. He would have a fighting chance, if he had the least recuperative desire. David doesn't want to get well. He said that death was nothing to be afraid of—after a man had lived."

"He sees an honourable way out of the hell he has had for thirty years," Syd muttered, his blue eyes wrathful, his slender hands clenched. "I hope there is a heaven—that he's so sure of. We know what it would be for him here, chained down to a pair of helpless legs. All his life he has walked away from it, when he had taken all he could endure. It would break Eileen's heart to see her father—"

Out in the kitchen Drusilla burst all at once into song:

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform.
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm."

The nurse hurried down to check the stridulous singing, and to say that Mr. Trench wanted to see his two daughters, Judith and Eileen, together. The specialist had said it would do him no harm to talk quietly with his family.

V

At the threshold Eileen asked, her face white with grief: "Judith, did I do this? Am I to blame for his fall? Last night he told Theo that when he was up on

that ledge, he saw something. And the pity and horror of it made him lose his footing. The poor baby thought he meant the burning of that ugly gable."

"I know what he had in mind, dear. You can go to him without a pang of regret."

A moment later the girl was kneeling at her father's side. There was no blemish on the beautiful face, no wasting, as of disease, and the blue eyes smiled tenderly, their smile changing to protest, as she cried:

"Oh, papa, this is the hardest part of my punishment—to know that I made you suffer. If only I had known!"

"You brought me the only real happiness of my life. It was worth all I paid. When I saw you—the day you came home from Europe—I almost died of joy. And when I heard you give your vow to Sydney, I said: 'My cup runneth over.' I know now why Sylvia had to treat him so cruelly. I asked God to make her realize his worth. What foolish children we are, when we pray. I knew the sorrow of his boyhood, and how pure his heart was. Eileen, none of us knew that he had to minister to a gentle, afflicted mother, all those years . . . just to fit him to be your husband."

"Papa!" The girl's tears wet her father's face. "And only you could have seen it. There isn't another man in the world who could have taken me—without ever humiliating me—and made me want to be the best woman that ever lived."

"And you won't ever forget that men need love?"

"They need it more than we do. Perhaps I can make up some of what I owe you—when I take care of Syd's father . . . make his home bright and happy."

David stroked her hand, his eyes wandering to the face of Judith who stood, shaken with emotion, at the foot of the bed.

"Come to me, dear daughter. I have something to tell you, while I have my wits about me. It may be our last chance."

The woman pressed her hand to her quivering chin, as the sobs surged up in her throat. Then she hid her face in the pillow, her cheek close to the dear face, so that David could whisper in her ear:

"You took care of the paper? You won't let her know I saw it? After I am gone, she can go to him and be happy. I forgive them, as Christ has forgiven me."

"Father! Now I can believe there *was* a Christ."

"It wasn't her fault, Judith. You were never harsh with Eileen. You must not be harsh with her. She was too brilliant for me. I was never anything but a drag. I was too stupid to understand, when she told me I had won her away from him. If I had had any wit—but I did love her so!"

It was not a wail of regret. Just a simple statement of fact. He had bought a priceless treasure and had paid for it with the sorrow of the loveless years. He looked up, to see Eileen gazing in troubled wonder.

"I didn't mean to say so much; but I believe it would be all right for you to tell her—about her mother. If it was right for Eileen—it couldn't have been wrong for her mother. We can't see the flowers when we put the ugly bulbs into the ground. Perhaps her own child can help you show her the path."

"Father, I can't endure it," Judith cried. "It was I who blundered. I tried to show her the way. I didn't know what her ailment was. I opened the wrong medicine."

"You gave her your best. That's all any of us can do. You and Eileen and I have suffered; but for my poor Vine it is terrible. She had so much love to give,

and it was all sealed up in her heart until it—putrified—poisoned her. Tell her that she was not to blame. Tell her that . . . Christ died . . . to make others . . . happy. . . .”

The words trailed off in a half audible whisper, and David Trench slept.

XXXIX Lavinia

I

It was the largest funeral Springdale had ever seen. Lavinia reflected, with grim pride, that not even President Henderson had called forth so many or such magnificent floral tributes. Dr. Clarkson conducted the simple service and the Conservatory Quartette sang the old sweet songs that David loved. With uncovered heads his townsmen stood by while his tired body sank to rest. Then life went on as before.

II

Lavinia and Theodora were alone in the big house with Drusilla. Lary thought it absurd for them to occupy so much room. He would be going to New York in the early fall, now that Springdale had nothing to hold him. His mother might as well return to Vine Cottage. She had built the great Colonial house in order to make a propitious marriage for Sylvia. A similar need would never confront her.

"Move into this little place? Indeed I shall do nothing of the sort. In fact, I have made up my mind to go back to Bromfield."

"Bromfield?" The tone carried something dangerously like a sneer.

"The town was good enough for your grandparents," his mother retorted hotly. "I won't have a relative left here but Eileen, and she will certainly never be any comfort to me. It's a shame, the way she could forget

her father in less than a month. She acts as if Dr. Schubert were her own father. I don't believe she has shed a tear. No, I wouldn't stop a day in Springdale for that ungrateful girl."

"But your friends of a lifetime are here."

"You can make new friends in New York. Why shouldn't I? You think of me as an old woman, Larimore. I don't like it. The day has gone by when a woman of fifty has to sit in the chimney-corner. I have written to Ted, telling him that I want to buy back the old home. You shall remodel it for me. That would be a work you could take pride in—the house your great-grandfather built."

III

When Lavinia and Judith were alone, the real purpose of the former's early morning call revealed itself:

"I want you to tell me how far you can hold a person to a promise—a voluntary promise, written on paper and signed."

"It depends—" Judith eyed her narrowly—"on the nature of the one who makes the promise. I wouldn't give a fig for all the contracts that ink and paper could record, if there were no volition—"

"Yes, but I am sure—that is, I think I have a right to demand. . . ." She swallowed hard and a hunted look invaded the black eyes. "Would it be all right for me to—to ask for some satisfaction, some decision? You can't let things go on in uncertainty. You have to come to an understanding. I—that is, I don't think my brother has treated me right. Would you send the letter?"

"Use your own judgment, mother. You know what

a wretched failure I made of my former attempts to advise you."

"No, Judith, that was what I wanted to say to you. I have thought it all out, and have come to the conclusion that—that I had to do everything just as it came about. Oh, I don't know how to tell you—but I begin to see how good comes out of evil—how I had to suffer to gain my happiness."

At the door she turned, to ask, as if she were consulting a sorceress: "Would you advise me to write the letter—a very plain one?"

"Suspense is deadly. I should relieve my mind, at any cost," her daughter-in-law said dryly. It was Lavinia Trench's self-justification, the mind that could mould the universe into a pedestal for the support of her righteousness. It would be this way to the end. Nothing would ever change her. David was dead, and a letter of condolence had come from Calvin Stone, a letter that all the world might read. In all likelihood there had been no other word from him, since Lavinia was free . . . to make uncomfortable demands.

She went home and wrote. With her own hands she carried the letter to the office, to insure delivery. It had occurred to her to register it . . . her feet tugging to free themselves from the quicksand of doubt that spread all around her. But Drusilla or Larimore might take the receipt from the postman's hand. Besides, it would be a confession of the fear that was in her. She must not act as if there were any question of her right, in this matter. To Lavinia it was still "this matter." She did not name it, even to herself.

IV

Six tortured days she waited, and then the response

came. Theodora ran in terror to Judith, her black eyes wide, her cheeks ashen.

"What is it, precious? Don't stand there shaking like that."

"It's my mamma, and she's—I think she's gone crazy."

"Because of something—a letter that came a few minutes ago?" She had the child in her arms, soothing her with gentle caresses.

"Oh, Sister Judith, what could my uncle write that would make anyone as furious as that? Last night she couldn't sleep—because she said our whole life depended on the letter she was looking for. She made me come and get in bed with her, and she told me about Bromfield till I fell asleep in her arms."

"And your uncle refused to let her have the old home?"

"I don't know. I was up on the third floor with Drusilla, and all at once I knew that I was needed down stairs. When I was half way down the hall—there stood my mamma like a statue. She didn't see me, any more than if I'd been a spook without any body. And all at once she began running back and forth and tearing the letter to bits. And then she threw them on the floor and stamped on them. She didn't speak one single word. That was the awful part—to be as mad as that, and take it out in just jumping up and down!"

"Stay here, dearie. Or, no—" after a moment's thought—"I want you to go and spend the day with Eileen. Don't tell her about the letter. Dutton can drive you over in the car. You won't need a hat."

V

Judith surmised that Lavinia would not miss the child. For an hour there was no sign of life in the big house.

Then the widow emerged clad in all her weeds. From the florist's shop, at the corner, she returned with a great cornucopia. It was evident that her destination was the cemetery, and that she intended to walk. For Lavinia Trench, on a steamy August day, such a walk was nothing short of a penance.

Noon went by . . . one, two o'clock . . . and she came staggering up the steps, and into the cool living-room of Judith Trench's home. Without a word she sank into the nearest chair and drew aside the crêpe veil, revealing a countenance from which every vestige of youth had been erased. With the toe of her small shoe she began to trace the winding pattern of the Oriental rug, her lips set hard together.

"Take off your hat, mother. You don't want that hot veil around your neck."

"Yes, I'll take it off. I don't intend ever to wear the thing again. If it isn't in your heart—crêpe veils and flowers on graves won't put it there. Oh, my God in heaven, why did David have to die—at such a time? What right had he to die—and expose me to such an insult?"

She had hurled the mourning hat from her, and sat staring at her moist shaking hands. Then came the reaction, a flood of colour, not scarlet but dull raspberry, that spread over neck, cheek and brow. Stiffening in her chair, she cried:

"It was you who did it, Judith Ascott, every bit of it."

"I did what?" Judith's eyes blazed with sudden anger. No, she would no longer palliate . . . spare this woman, who had always contrived to shift responsibility to shoulders less blameworthy than her own, who had taken the best she could snatch from life, giving not even decent gratitude in return.

"You said that Sydney married Eileen and made her happy, because she didn't resist the temptation to do wrong."

"Oh, how monstrous!"

"Well, I hope you aren't going to deny that you told me, point-blank, that nothing but a broken axle prevented you from being untrue to your husband. Was it my fault that the axle didn't break for me?" She talked wildly, her thin neck drawn and throbbing.

"I blundered horribly when I said those things to you. I thought you were a woman who could handle an abstract idea. I didn't know that everything I said must necessarily have a personal application. If I had understood why you were unhappy . . . if you had told me the truth, instead of leaving me to guess it, after the mischief was done—"

"I ought to have told you—told such a thing to a stranger . . . when I never more than half admitted it to myself?"

"No, I am sure you couldn't have told me. It is just the awful fatality, that I should have put weapons into your hand that would wound you—the very knives that removed the false growth from Eileen's spirit."

"Yes, and if the cancer is deep inside—if it grows out of your heart . . . the more you cut it away, the stronger it grows. God knows, I tried to tear it out by the roots. I tried three times to hate—"

VI

Judith drew near and laid a hand on the frantic woman's arm.

"Mother, it is the saddest case I have ever known. If I assure you of my pity and my earnest wish to help you . . . for Lary's sake, and Theo's," Judith raised a hand

that checked the bitter outburst, "will you talk to me with absolute frankness? You can't bear this hideous thing alone. You can't take it to your daughter."

"Sylvia! I would as soon put my hand in the fire, and expect not to be burned. She would throw me out of her house, as an abandoned woman. She is hard and selfish and cruel. I don't know where she gets such a nature."

"We won't talk of Sylvia now."

"No, I hope I'll never see her again. And . . . Judith . . . I am going to tell you . . . from the beginning. You know already—the worst of it. David knew, the night before he died. That's why I had to run away, when I tried to lay the roses on his grave. It made me wild with rage . . . to know he was pitying me."

She rocked to and fro a moment, as if to settle the sequence of her story. Then her eyes blazed with a challenging light.

"You are a cold woman. You can sit there and weigh me . . . like a pound of steak. You never knew what it was to want something with your whole mind and body and soul. You are not capable of a passion that would burn you to a cinder. There are not many women with as deep a nature as mine. It began when I was fourteen—a plain little thing like Theo is, now. The night of Edith Trench's Hallowe'en party—and David begged his sister to invite me. All the others were grown, nearly. I happened to be standing in a dark corner, under some mistletoe, and Calvin Stone tiptoed up behind me and grabbed me in his arms and kissed me.

"That night I couldn't sleep . . . nor the next one. Everything was changed. For two years, I used to almost die when I saw him out with the older girls. Then he went away to Buffalo, to business college, and I

began to grow pretty. It's a way we have in my father's family. When he came home, he fairly swept me off my feet. If David had ever made love to me the way Calvin did— The room would swim before my eyes when he kissed me. He wanted me to marry him right away. But in Bromfield that would have made a scandal. A girl didn't dare to seem too anxious.

"After about a year he began to cool off. I waited two years more, and then I married David. I may as well tell you why. Calvin went to Rochester and married that Fournier girl. She made him marry her. Thank goodness, I was safe in Olive Hill before they let it out that they were married. But the truth has leaked out at last. It always does, no matter how smart you think you are in concealing it."

She stopped. This was not what she wanted to say—or believe. A deep nausea overcame her. Eileen's secret . . . her own! But no, she was making confession. It would not go any further, if she told Judith all . . . to the last wicked detail.

"Ellen thought all along that I married David for spite; but she doesn't know that I never got over loving Calvin Stone. When I was first married I used to lie awake nights, thinking of the time when David and Lettie would both be dead, and I could have the man I wanted. I forced David to make good, so that I could taunt Calvin. After he moved back to Bromfield—when his father broke down, and he had to take charge of the bank—Ellen and Lettie were friends. That way, I learned a good deal about them. I saved all her letters that mentioned Calvin. The others I put in the fire, as soon as David had read them. The bundle I want buried with me. It was reading them over and over that made me the woman I am now."

"Mother, can't you go home and burn them—blot this hateful thing from your mind—now when your heart is soft because of father?"

"David Trench! He doesn't count, one way or the other. David was never anything but a makeshift in my life. If he had abused me, instead of giving me all that affection, it wouldn't have been so bad. I didn't want his love, and I despised him because he could go on loving me . . . the way I treated him. I hated my children, because he was their father. After they came, I loved them for what I could see of myself in them. Isabel was so like her father that it was comical—and I could hardly bear to touch her. Judith, think of being a wife for almost thirty years to a man you hated! You couldn't have gone through it."

"No, I would have run away."

"But I hadn't any place to run to. I was caught, like a hungry rat in a trap. I could look out through the bars and see all the things I wanted, beyond my reach. When I did drag something inside, it turned out to be different from what I expected. When we celebrated our silver wedding, the minister told how we were the ideal couple, that God had joined together in our cradles. It was the vilest mockery. But David was so proud."

"And you never saw his worth—never responded to his tenderness?"

"Not until I came home from Bromfield, two years ago. That was the only time David and I came together, in all those years. I never knew how handsome he was until I had been looking at Calvin every day for a month. And his appearance wasn't all of it. I had made up my mind, while I was still at Ellen's, that I was going to treat David different. You couldn't help seeing that I had all the best of the bargain. The house Calvin built, ten

years ago, is no comparison to mine. And he had to mortgage it to the limit, when his son got into trouble. Lately he sold it, to keep from losing it outright. That was when I wrote him that I would buy back the old house from my brother. But that's. . . . I'll come to that, later on. All those years I had been thinking of David as a poor carpenter, and Calvin as a banker, in fine society. And when I found out that he didn't have near as much as I had—"

"I see how you found your deep satisfaction."

"No, you don't. It wasn't just the money, and David's position in Springdale—on the Board of Trustees, and all that. I got my real triumph after I started for home. I had snubbed Calvin and tormented him in every way I could. I wasn't going to let him think I went to Bromfield on his account. Besides, I wanted to hurt him, for the way he had treated me. I thought I would take it out on him, and that would end it. If I had been trying to win him, I couldn't have used better tactics.

"I was on the train and we were pulling out of Rochester when he came walking in the Pullman. At first he pretended to be surprised. Said he was going to Buffalo on business. After a while he owned up that he had come . . . because he wanted to be alone with me. He told me that his life had been hell on earth, and he was glad when Lettie died. He even said that if David should die, he would go to the end of the world to compel me to marry him."

"The boor!"

Lavinia ignored the comment. Hot lava was pouring from the crater of her wretchedness, lava long pent up, and such flimsy obstacles as her daughter-in-law's disgust were swept away unnoticed in its stream.

"I told him he wasn't fit for David Trench to wipe his feet on. I didn't mean it . . . but I talk that way when I am beside myself. When I repulsed David, he would look hurt and walk away. But it only made Calvin more determined. He said he would lie down and let me wipe my feet on him. And then he said something sneering about 'Dave Trench.' I flew into a rage—and he said I always was a beauty when I was angry. Afterwards he almost cried when he begged me to show some little spark of affection for him. He was always that way . . . wanted what he thought he couldn't get. I see the whole thing now, as plain as day. It is easy to see things, when it's too late. If the minister hadn't preached that sermon about helping to redeem sinners by making them suffer, and you hadn't told me all that other . . . about it being worse to want to sin than to come right out and do the thing you wanted. . . ."

Judith shifted uneasily in her chair. Her own indictment was surely on the way. She had no choice but to see the play through, to the final curtain.

"He began writing to me, on one pretext or another. I didn't answer more than half of his letters. And the meaner I treated him, the more devoted he grew. All that time I was falling in love with David—and I didn't hesitate to tell Calvin so. It seemed to make him wild. The very day I found out about Eileen, I had had a letter from him that I was ashamed to read, in my own room. I believe that letter would have finished him for me . . . if it hadn't been for Eileen.

"When he heard about Larimore's marriage, he wrote again—and asked me to forgive him for writing the other letter. But he said his love for me drove him to it. And at the same time, David was acting like a paralytic old woman—just crushed by what Eileen had

done. I couldn't help seeing the difference. I knew what Calvin would have done, if he had had a daughter act that way. He would have put his son in jail, if it hadn't been for Lettie."

"You needed a masterful man. David was too gentle. . . ."

"He never was any match for me . . . in any way. If I hadn't snapped him up, the night after Mr. Stone told me that Calvin was married. . . ." She shook herself, as if to free her body from some insidious lethargy that was creeping over her.

"While you and Larimore were in Europe, it got to be like a continued story in a magazine. I kept wondering what would happen next. I had cut loose from David, and I couldn't keep my mind off of Calvin. After you came home with Eileen, and I had the long talk with you, the story took a different turn. Still . . . I don't believe anything would have come of it if Calvin hadn't had to take a business trip to Chicago. He wrote, in a kind of joking way, that if I would run up there and spend a few days with him, David would divorce me and we could be married at once. That was last April. I wrote back that I wouldn't think of such a thing—and that men didn't marry the women who forgot their morals—except at the point of a gun. He answered, with a kind of marriage compact—no matter what might come up—he would marry me as soon as I was free. He had to go to Chicago again in July. I told him I would see him in Sylvia's home, on his way out, and we could talk things over, and come to an understanding. It was all Larimore's fault that the whole thing turned out wrong."

"How Lary's fault?"

"You know he wouldn't let me start in time to catch Calvin in Detroit. Then I planned to go by way of

Chicago, and see him between trains. But Larimore insisted on getting the ticket direct. There was only one thing for me to do. I wired Calvin, and sent a special letter to Sylvia, saying I wouldn't be in Detroit until Tuesday noon. I planned to get into Chicago early Monday morning, and go back to Detroit that night. I wrote the letter to David while I was waiting at the station, Sunday afternoon. The rest of it—after Calvin met me—is like a dream, a miserable dream. So much has happened since then.

"That evening he made me miss my train. After I had been with him a while, I was limp as a rag in his hands. He always had that way with women. I didn't want to go. All the years of my misery had dissolved. I was like a starved person at a banquet . . . seventeen again, and Calvin acting like a boy out of school. But the second day he began to change. He told me to quit acting like an old fool—said it wasn't becoming in people of our age. If David had ever said anything like that to me—" Her hands worked convulsively and the teeth gave forth a sharp, gritting sound. "I tried to be the way Calvin wanted me, and everything I did was wrong. Once I flared up, and he told me to cut that out—that it was because of my vile temper that he didn't marry me thirty years ago."

"And you are going to discipline yourself, mother, so that after your year of mourning you can marry him and be happy?"

"Marry him!" A shrill laugh burst from Lavinia's lips. "Marry him! He was married last Saturday to a rich widow in Rochester. That isn't the worst of it. I had written him the plainest kind of letter—about the house we would remodel—and the contract he had sent me in April. They read it together. They are laughing

at me now. God, I can't stand it! To have them gloat over me! I could tear my heart out and stamp on it. I could curse. I could spit in the face of the God that made me. Why did you advise me to write the letter? It was you—you—"

She had leaped from her chair, her face livid, her arms writhing. Judith tried to speak. Her tongue was paralysed. She had looked into the soul of the woman who bore Larimore Trench, and the sight turned her sick with horror. Then a piercing scream, a startled cry, another scream, and Lavinia crumpled down in her chair, clasping her hands to her right side, shrieking and moaning by turns.

"Mother, what has happened to you? Let me send for a doctor."

"No, no, don't leave me!" A long wail of anguish indescribable—and she put forth a restraining hand. "Don't you know what has happened to me? Can't you see that I am dying? Dr. Schubert told me two years ago that there was danger. I didn't believe him. . . ."

She choked back another cry of pain, cringing until her right cheek almost touched her knee. Then she straightened herself and went on, through set teeth:

"You will take Theo, Judith, and keep her for your own? I wouldn't want Sylvia to have her. You won't let her—miss the path?"

"I will give her the best I have, mother. I know what you mean." She stopped speaking, fascinated by the tinge of green that crept slowly up the stricken woman's cheeks. The same dull green was advancing along the arms, where the black sleeves were drawn up. Lavinia saw it, too. She knew the portent. Once before, she had seen that wave of green that moved with deadly precision beneath the skin.

"It's the gall. It has burst. My grandmother died that way. She flew into a rage—after the doctor warned her not to. I taste it, now . . . bitter . . . in my throat. . . ." She coughed spasmodically, and closed her eyes.

VII

Judith ran to the telephone. She told Lary that his mother had fainted. To Eileen she said bluntly: "Mother is dying. Send one of the doctors."

Eileen called a dozen numbers before she located either Sydney or his father. Then she left her little sister in Nanny's care and hurried to Vine Cottage.

When the old family physician reached the house, Lavinia Trench had passed beyond human aid. He drew Judith into the breakfast room and asked, unsteadily:

"Was there a violent outburst? Grief wouldn't account for it . . . nor remorse."

The woman nodded, her throat swelling.

"Don't tell Lary. He need not know. He wouldn't understand. Women are so different, Dr. Schubert. I wouldn't want Lary to despise his mother. She wasn't wholly to blame—that the frost came too late."

THE END









